

Volume VIII

On the Wings of the Swan

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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With kind regards, ॐ and prem

Swami Niranjan

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Satsangs given at Ganga Darshan, Munger, 2008



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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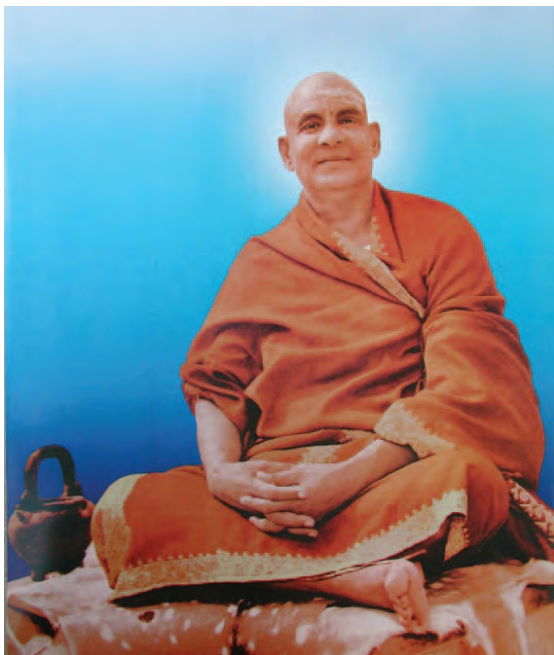
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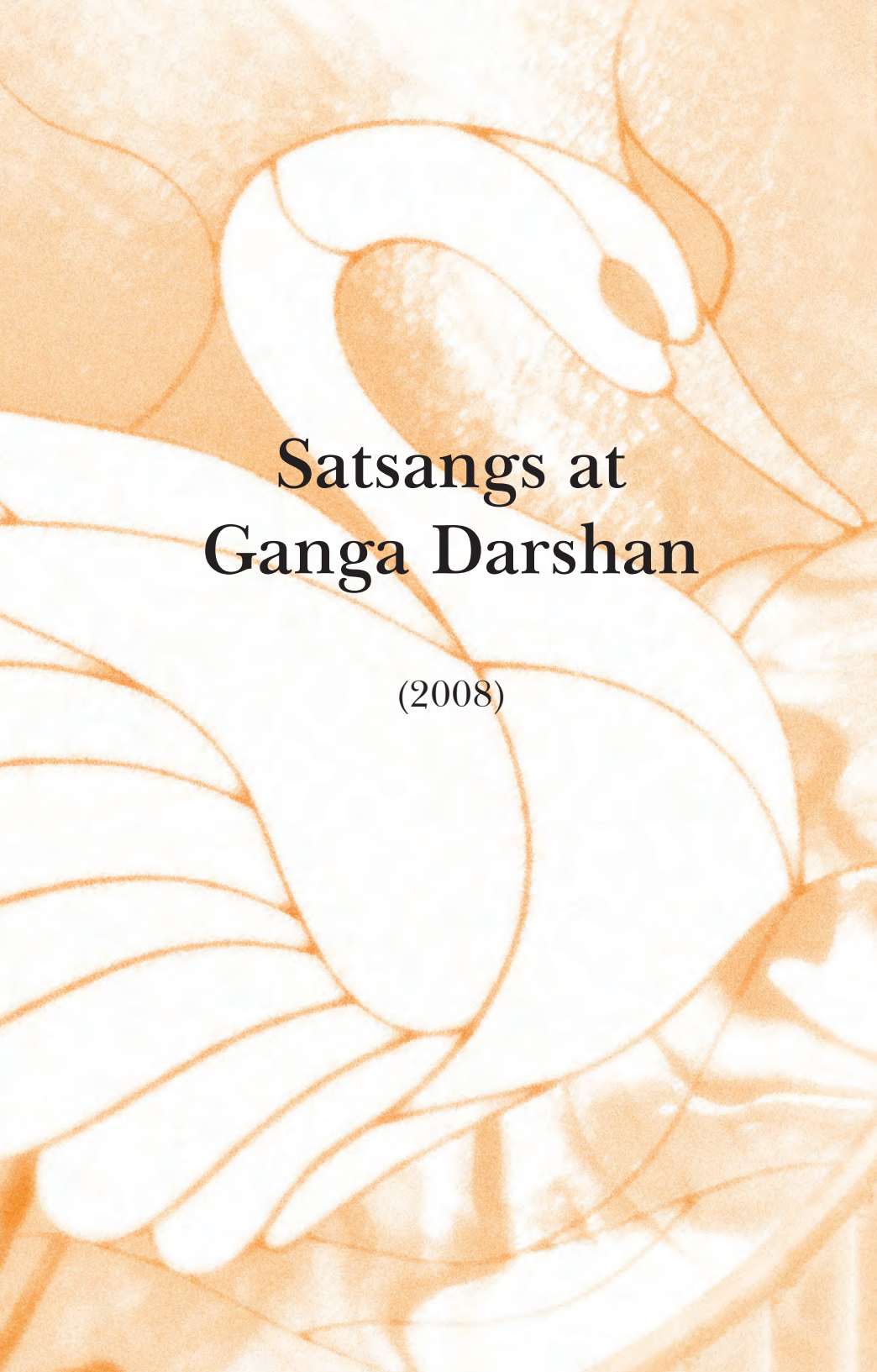
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*



Satsangs at Ganga Darshan

(2008)



Can you please give some outlines on how to maintain sadhana when we leave the ashram?

This question is relevant as by the end of the month many of you will have gone back to your homes; therefore, it is important to think about how you can maintain your yoga sadhana and cultivate your spiritual life. During your stay at Ganga Darshan, you have had glimpses into many things: mantras, asanas, pranayamas, meditation techniques, relaxation techniques. Now you have to see how all these practices that you have been exposed to, or that you have experienced, can be fitted in your daily routine.

Morning sadhana

My recommendation is that in the morning when you wake up, before you do anything – that is, before breakfast, before turning on the television, before picking up the newspaper and before interacting with other people in the house or with family members – the first practice that should be done is the practice of the three mantras. They are important. When you sleep at night, apart from the body, the mind also relaxes, and when you wake up in the morning, the mind is free from tensions and free from external worldly inputs. You have not switched on your computer yet; the computer is still off. At that time, practise the three mantras. First, the Mahamrityunjaya mantra eleven times with the sankalpa of

physical and psychological wellbeing and health. Then you practise the Gayatri mantra eleven times with the sankalpa of developing wisdom and acquiring the rare common sense, which is uncommon in the world. The third mantra to be chanted three times is the thirty-two names of Durga with the sankalpa to remove distress, difficulties and obstacles in life. The use of these three mantras will give a good start to your day, placing positive sankalpas in the peaceful mind; those sankalpas will take root there and gradually, in the course of time, you will feel the benefits.

After completing the three mantras and before opening your computer, having your breakfast and talking to other people, you can do an asana and pranayama practice of your choice. However, analyze things carefully. Which asanas are important to maintain a balanced and healthy life? I recommend five, and I do not consider any other asanas necessary beyond the five to maintain a good, balanced and healthy life. What are these five asanas? Tadasana for traction of the body to open up all the stiff joints; tiryak tadasana, a lateral stretch to lengthen and contract the side muscles, as these muscles are rarely used in our daily activities; kati chakrasana, twisting of the trunk and spine; surya namaskara, which includes forward and backward movements of the body; and one inverted posture. Whether you do sarvangasana or another inverted posture is up to you. For a good healthy life, no more asanas are needed as personal practice, though beyond these you are free to choose any asana.

There are three recommended pranayamas. First, *kapalbhati*, frontal brain bellows breathing, to expel all the accumulated toxins from the lungs, to stimulate the lungs and to allow better absorption of oxygen from the air that you breathe in. After that, nadi shodhana pranayama as you are used to doing it, either with an equal ratio, 5:5:5 for example or with a ratio of 1:2:1 or 1:4:2. Nadi shodhana pranayama will help remove the stress from the sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous systems. The third is

bhramari pranayama, to vibrate the brain, to stimulate the pineal and pituitary glands, to regulate the output of the hormones. These three pranayamas are a must. Beyond this, any other pranayama that you want to do, you are free to do. This is the morning practice.

Evening sadhana

In the afternoon, during siesta time or in the evening when you have returned from work, relax with yoga nidra. It will allow you consciously to release from the body and mind the stresses and tensions that accumulate due to your interactions at the workplace, in society, in your family.

In the evening, three practices should be done: *trataka*; *japa* using your own mantra if you have one or the *So-Ham* mantra of *ajapa japa*; and *antar mouna*. These three meditative practices can flow into one another. Begin with *trataka* for ten minutes. After that blow the candle out, keep your eyes closed, continue seeing the after image. When the after image disappears, become aware of the breath and move into the practice of *ajapa*. Observe the breath movement from navel to throat to eyebrow centre. After some time start synchronizing the breath with the mantra. Do this for ten minutes. Then stop the mantra, stop breath awareness and practise *antar mouna*, inner silence; just be aware of the mind, the thoughts that come up or the blank state of the mind. This simple, basic program will be useful to maintain the connection between body, mind and inner spirit.

Most people have a lifestyle of working hard, but they are not connected with their body, their mind, or their spirit. This disconnection from the body, mind and spirit eventually leads to distress in life – physical, psychological and psychic. By maintaining this routine of yoga, you are maintaining a connection. At least once a day you are observing the whole body, every part of the body, letting go of all the tightness and tensions from the body. You are observing your mind, seeing which thoughts influence your behaviour, your responses and your reactions. In this way, a connection is

maintained and you are able to heal the disturbed areas of your body and mind.

Mouna

If possible, practise mouna one day per week. Mouna is generally thought to mean silence; however, the word 'mouna' comes from the Sanskrit root which means 'to measure'. *Mouna* means measuring, limiting, confining or balancing the mental activity, the mental behaviour and the mental expression. The mind is directly linked with the tongue, as whatever happens in the mind, is expressed through the tongue in the form of speech. If you are frustrated, depressed or elated, the tongue will express it. Whatever you feel in the mind, speech expresses that. However, when you practise mouna, you are cutting off the connection between mind and speech, and that forces you to observe the mind. If you cut off the connection between mind and speech, if you stop speaking, you become more intently and intensely aware of the activities of the mind.

In the ashram, during the evening, those people who follow mouna are aware of what they are thinking, feeling, expecting and desiring, as the entire focus goes to the mind. Mouna functions in a systematic way. You begin to remove the layers like peeling an onion. You remove one layer, then you remove another layer, then another, until you come to the point in the centre. You will discover the same thing with yourself at home. The purpose is to measure and balance what is happening inside the head. Therefore, one day of mouna should ideally be practised each week, or at least half a day. If even that is not possible, then a minimum of three hours. Choose a day according to your convenience.

What is discipline and what is indiscipline?

Discipline means to become responsible; indiscipline means to become irresponsible. It is as simple as that. If you are responsible and you act in a responsible manner, you are disciplined. If you behave in an irresponsible manner, then

naturally you will be labelled as undisciplined. The problem is that people want 'rights'. 'This is my right. That is my right.' People are more aware of their rights and less aware of their responsibility – the basic idea is forgotten. People want rights without responsibility. However, if you become responsible, then naturally you get rights. Discipline is nothing but being responsible for oneself. Discipline does not mean that you have to act according to this time or that time, within these parameters or limitations, or in this area. All that can change: today you are here, tomorrow you will be some place else. However, if you become responsible for yourself, your development, your wellbeing and your peace, then that responsibility will be seen as a discipline – in action, behaviour, attitude and mentality.

What is responsibility? I do not have to define that. You know what responsibility means. There is a greater sense of responsibility when you feel that you belong. For example, a piece of rubbish has been thrown on the path. Somebody goes and picks it up, and puts it in the rubbish bin. It did not tax anyone; it was a simple act. If you leave the rubbish and wait for somebody else to remove it, are you being responsible? If somebody tells you, "Please pick up that rubbish," a reaction happens.

Discipline is not a structured method, system or lifestyle – that in the morning you do this, in the afternoon do this, in the evening do this. Routines change from place to place. In your home you also have a routine, but by following the routine you do not become disciplined; it is by becoming responsible for your development that you become disciplined. When you are responsible all rights come to you naturally; nobody can deny you any rights. On the other hand, if you want rights and you do not want responsibility, you will struggle with everyone, whether it is your family members or the government. Therefore, take responsibility for your growth and development. That is the best form of discipline, which will also make you free from your own mental hang-ups, reactions and bondages.

How can we identify our karmas and how do we know if we are living according to our dharma?

One cannot identify what one's karmas are. If it was that simple, everybody would know it by now, as karmas become attitudes which guide us. Karmas become the *samskaras*, the impressions, that make up our personality and nature. Karmas are the foundation blocks on which a building can be built. We are all manifest karmas. It is not possible to know what one's karmas are; however, it becomes possible to know what one's aspirations are, what one's motivations are, what one's desires are and whether those motivations, desires and expectations are limited to one's individual good, or if they also create good for others. That is where the discrimination has to come in. One cannot know karma; therefore one cannot work with karma, yet through discrimination one can become observant of the karmic manifestations in the form of motivations, expectations, attachments, desires, and so on.

There are some special people who can transform karmas. For example, when I was born they made my birth chart, or horoscope. Actually, in my case it was not a horoscope, it was a 'horror-scope'. It said that this person will be destitute, will have no money, no family and he will destroy the family lineage. However, guru changed the whole thing. I still do not have money yet I do not lack money – I know it is not mine; I am the caretaker. I have destroyed my family; I am not married and I have no children. As a sannyasin, though, I have a bigger family, many brothers, sisters, sons, daughters and parents.

The encounter with guru changed everything. All the predictions have come true, yet I am not in pain, I am not suffering, I am happy. That has been the change in my destined karma. Alternatively, maybe the horoscope was an indication that ultimately this person would become a sannyasin. I do not know that. I can only speculate and guess. Nonetheless, the point is that if one can live life with wisdom and dignity, negative karmas will not have any influence

or role to play; the positive karmas manifest much more strongly. If life is not faced with wisdom and dignity, even the smallest of karmas can become a major obstacle, the smallest problem can become as high as a mountain. Therefore, there has to come a time in life when the unknown should be left alone, and you allow God to guide you through the uncharted waters. I think that is the best way.

Can the Mahamrityunjaya havan be done at home? And if so, can it be done by a female?

If you are a human being, yes, you can do it. Whether you are male or female, it makes no difference. Havan is an ancient tradition like yoga. Until now havan was confined to *karmakanda*, which means ritual, ritualistic patterns of life. However, in reality, havan is not just a ritual; it is a connection between the cosmos, the divine and the individual. You have seen the pandits perform it, yet we are all part of the same havan energy, part of that same flow and force.

The power of yajna

The opening statement in the invitation sent out for the Sat Chandi Mahayajna is a statement by Sri Swamiji that says, “Through havan we can find solutions to the ecological problems that the world is facing.” In vedic times, havan was used for that. Today people are experimenting with ‘seeding’ clouds, to bring rain. Experiments have been done in Russia, in the USA and other parts of the world, including India. How do they seed the clouds? From above, they drop something on the clouds that creates a chemical reaction and produces rain. If our civilization is destroyed and somebody in the future says that the past civilization used to seed the clouds for rain, who would believe it? The same thing has happened with yajna too.

Yajna is a technology, which the ancients have used for many purposes in the past, including rain. In the vedic and tantric scriptures, so many different kinds of havans have been prescribed for all manner of things, including progeny.

People have tried even today and it works; a barren woman can conceive as the havan, the smoke and the mantras alter the physical chemistry. If you read the *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata*, the effect of havan has been explained. Rama and his three brothers were born due to havan. Their father was old; he would have been in his late fifties or sixties, and he had married three times, with the sole purpose of acquiring a son. All attempts had failed until, ultimately, a yajna was performed. As a result of the yajna, Rama and the three brothers were born. Now this can be taken as a myth, however, today it is also a reality. I have seen people who had no progeny and who performed the Putreyeshti Yajna, which is for progeny, and children have been born to such parents – ‘immaculate conception’. I can give you one straight example, as I am the result of one such havan; therefore I was given the name Niranjan, which means ‘immaculate’. Similarly, there have been people who have created rain in a desert through havan.

An interesting experiment was conducted by the government of India in the mid-seventies to create fire. A house was constructed for the experiment and people chanting mantras surrounded the house holding hands. The scientists placed different types of equipment inside the house so that they could monitor the temperature from the outside. They found that after sometime, with the chanting of mantra, the temperature inside the house started to rise. Within a period of four hours, it became so hot that eventually the house caught fire. That is the effect and power of mantra if it is done in the right manner. Therefore, when yajna is performed, it is not merely conducting a ritual; it is invoking the power to do the right thing, and if the invocation is done in the right manner, it will happen.

Sri Swamiji gave the gift of yoga to Munger, and the gift of yajna he gave to Rikhia. These are Sri Swamiji’s two major contributions. He said that in today’s time and in today’s society, if anything can save the world from self-destruction, it is yoga and yajna. Of course, it is not possible for everyone

to do a big yajna; however, smaller havans can be performed by anybody at home. The whole family can perform it; males can perform it, females can perform it, children can perform it, there is no restriction.

Mahamrityunjaya havan

The Mahamrityunjaya mantra havan is the simplest form of yajna. There is also another simple form, which the agnihotris teach and it takes about five minutes to perform. The mantra is: *Om agneya namah, agneyidam namah, om suryaih namah, suryaidam namah*. There are havans that you can complete in five minutes, in one hour or in one week. The difference is whether you want one grain, one spoonful or one basket of sugar in your cup of tea. The agnihotra is like one grain of sugar in your tea. It has sweetened it a fraction, however, it has not sweetened the whole cup of tea. The one-hour havan is like one teaspoonful of sugar, which can sweeten the tea; and the one-week havan, it is like one bucket of sugar and for that you need to have a big cup.

Mahamrityunjaya havan can and should be performed by all those people who are considerate and who care for the betterment of human society and the planet on which we live. If everyone performs it, you will make me extremely happy. Every Saturday invite your family members and friends and for one hour be together in the spirit of healing yourself, healing the environment and healing the planet.

What does the integral yoga think about homosexuality?

Yoga does not think anything about homosexuality, or any other form of sexuality. Yoga is not a belief system that says this is right and this is wrong. How you live your life, what your requirements and needs are, that is your business. Yoga is concerned with developing your inner potentials, and is applicable to each and everyone in society. Whether you are homosexual or bisexual, it makes no difference. However, if you can develop your own inner potential, you will fulfil the aspiration of yoga.

What is the importance of the spiritual name and how should we approach our spiritual name in our daily sadhana?

You all have names, whether in Chinese, Korean, Tibetan, Russian, English, German, Hindi or Sanskrit. The problem is that people do not identify or even know the meaning of their name. If somebody is asked the meaning of their name, they are lost. They begin to associate the name with some historical figure that is in the remote corner of their mind, which they remember all of a sudden and which simply means that they do not know the meaning of their name.

Now what is a spiritual name? A spiritual name represents a quality of the spirit with which you begin to identify yourself. It becomes the aspiration in life, a goal that you have to attain or something you wish to develop and nurture in your life. My name is Niranjana, which means ‘immaculate’ or ‘untainted’ and that becomes my goal – to live a life where I am not tainted by anything and to identify that name with a quality of my own spirit. My guru’s name is Satyananda, which was the aspiration for him. That name had been given to him by his guru as an aim: to become that, to live that and to acquire that ability. Therefore, a spiritual name always connects you with a quality of your own inner self. If you remember that, and if you try to be that by modifying your lifestyle, your understanding and your beliefs, you attain something beautiful, more fulfilling and much more satisfying.

A spiritual name is given to connect you with your inner nature. Previously spiritual names were given to anyone who asked. At that time there were few people; however, when the numbers began to grow it became difficult to give a spiritual name to everyone and the system had to be changed. Now, only those who take jñāna or karma sannyasa receive a spiritual name. It is better that way, as once you take a step into jñāna or karma sannyasa it means that you are aware of your need and your aspiration to evolve.

What is the yogic concept of spirit, *atma*?

I know of two spirits: one that is transcendental and the other that comes in a bottle. The one that is transcendental and the one that comes in a bottle, they both have the same function. Their smell is a little different; however, they both elate you, they take you up. In the transcendental form you go up and also in the bottle form you go up. There is, however, a downside to the bottle form; it affects your kidneys and liver, and can create problems. On the other hand, there is no downside to the transcendental spirit. It simply keeps taking you up, up and up. Although I am saying it as a joke, this is not a joke. Many ancient sadhakas have compared God-intoxication with the intoxication that you have with normal spirit.

Peele, peele, peele, peele;

Ram naam ras pyala jisko peekar tu hota hai matwala.

Ab bottle peekar bhi hota hia,

aur Ram naam ras karke bhi aadmi matwala hota hai.

There is also a beautiful poem by Bachan, Madhushala –

Dharma granth mein jala chuki hai, jiski ur ki jwala.

Religions have burnt the flame in the heart of the people,
and such people need to take recourse in the spirit.

It can be taken both ways, as those who have cold hearts need ‘spirits’ to warm themselves; to warm, as they say in England, ‘the cockles of the heart’. The intoxication of those who are intoxicated by God’s name is the same as that of a person who is intoxicated by drinking wine, in both cases it is a change in the state of mind that takes place.

Ishwara and nashwara

The question was on spirit and the yogic view. The yogic view of the spirit is explained in two sutras in the *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali, which say that spirit, or *atma*, is part of *ishwara*, the undecaying reality. ‘Ishwara’ is a

peculiar word. There are two words: *ishwara*, which means the transcendental reality in general terms; and *nashwara*, which means the decaying reality, the impermanent reality. The only common thing between the two is 'shwara'. The meaning of the word 'shwa' is tomorrow; however, not the English meaning of tomorrow or the Hindi meaning of tomorrow, though *kal* in Hindi means both tomorrow and yesterday, past and future.

When consciousness is infused with energy, with power, and therefore becomes permanent, both what is to come and what is past becomes permanent. That something which is permanent at all times, that does not change and is a constant continuous reality is *ishwara*. Something that changes and decays every day, which is different tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, like this body, is *nashwara*. The undecaying principle is *ishwara* and the decaying principle is *nashwara*. Every day, right from the day of our birth until we say '*Hari Om*' or 'goodbye' to the world, our bodies are in a process of change and transformation. I am not the same person who sat before you one hour ago to give the satsang. Internally I have changed; you have also changed. So many cells have died and so many cells have taken birth. Tomorrow the body will be different, the day after tomorrow it will be different, and the change in our body is seen in the wrinkles that appear on our faces. That is the decaying principle, *nashwara*. Creation, humans, animals, insects, everything, is *nashwara*. The five elements – earth, water, fire, air and ether – are *nashwara*, as they are not permanent; they are only the containers. That which is permanent and constant is consciousness infused with force and power: *ishwara*. This is the first statement of the *Yoga Sutras* in relation to *ishwara*.

When the spirit enters matter

Other words have also been used to describe *ishwara*: *vishesha* and *pradhana*. *Pradhana* means 'primary' and *vishesha* means 'special'. Therefore, that which is primary,

that which is special, that which is constant, continuous and does not change, and that which is infinite is the spirit. Ishwara is part of that constant, continuous, permanent, transcendental energy which is connected to matter. When matter comes into existence, part of that consciousness also comes into existence and becomes nashwara.

What were we before we were born, as an embryo? Were we conscious? Did we have a mind? Did we have awareness? Did we have sight, smell, touch, thoughts, ideas? No. We were only a cluster of cells. This cluster of cells that grew out of a sperm and ovum was infused by something in the mother's womb, the spirit. From where did that spirit come?

When creation is taking place, there are certain elements that are in the environment, that are necessary for something to be created. For example, if you are making a clay pot, what is the most critical item required to add to the earth? Water. Not fire. Fire comes later and it has a limited role. However, without water, you cannot start the process; without water you cannot give shape to the raw material. You need water to turn the earth into mud. Water becomes an inherent and integral part of the clay. Then you give it a shape. Similarly, for the cluster of cells to come alive, another item has to come in and that is the spirit. If that item does not come, a dead child will be born, a stillborn child, which cannot be tempered in the fire of the world.

Different names of God

Ishwara is that special primary something – pradhana and vishesha – which comes in, and this is the concept of God in yoga. Rama, Krishna, Brahma, Vishnu and Devi are not yogic concepts; they are tantric and vedic concepts. The yogic concept is simple and clear; that which is constant and continuous, and unaffected by changes in creation, is the ultimate, primary reality. You can call that by any name you wish. Other traditions, such as the vedic or tantric schools of thought, have given different names to understand the various processes that happen in life.

In life we go through many changes. We are born, become youngsters, grow and become adults. The process continues and we become old. Why is it that at each stage in life a different name is given to us? The name is given according to the condition of the body. First somebody says, “Hey, kid!” then somebody says, “You, young man.” Then somebody tells us, “You have grown up. You are a grown-up.” Then somebody tells us, “You are old,” and then somebody tells us, “You are dead!” Although all along you are one.

Why have you been given labels that reflect different stages in your life – as a small child, as a young man, as an adult, as an old person? The reason is that they represent different conditions of life. Similarly, in the vedic and the tantric traditions, whether it is Rama, Devi, Krishna or Shiva, the name represents different stages of inner experience. To say, “Oh, I believe in this” and “I do not believe in that” is inappropriate: it is like saying you believe in being young and not in being old. When physically you are eighty-five years old, you are old. You can believe anything; you can believe that you are not even born, yet the reality is different.

Recognizing inner experiences

Similarly, as consciousness or the mind goes through different stages of illumination, a different expression of that cosmic power is felt inside; and the expression of cosmic power has been given a particular name. When you live your life righteously within defined parameters, *maryada*, that is the experience of Rama. That is the experience of the Rama force. When you live your life and create trouble for others, when you enjoy life and run wild, that is the Krishna consciousness – where you are not confined by anything, you are just free. When you begin to nurture, support and sustain life – not that you believe or think that, but when you become that nurturing – then that is the Devi experience.

All these tantric and vedic names that have been given to this *Brahman*, the transcendental spirit, represent different

states of illumination that you go through in your process of sadhana. Ultimately, they do not represent divinity; they are divine qualities. They are divine qualities, which are manifesting in life in a confined space, in a confined environment, in a confined personality and in a confined body. Salty water in a glass is not called the ocean. It can be called 'salty water in a glass' or 'salty water in a container', yet it cannot be called an ocean. However, when you put the glass of salty water in the ocean, then you say it is the 'ocean'. The ocean is Brahman, the ever-expanding reality – the continuous, unbroken and undecaying principle. Measure out as many cups and glasses of water as you want and they will all be identified by different names: 'water in a glass', 'water in a cup', 'water in jug' – the glass, cup or jug is an identification. It is the same with Rama, Krishna, Devi, and so on. They are internal as well as external, as this energy or transcendental power infuses everything in the world. What is not infused by this transcendental power does not exist. Creation is the outcome of this cosmic power becoming infused in the different elements.

—8 January 2008

Tantra is often mentioned in the Bihar School of Yoga. What is the exact connection between tantra and yoga, and which practices and teachings in BSY are adopted from tantra?

Today, people throughout the world believe tantra to be related to sexual relationships. That is how commerce-minded people have projected and presented tantra in order to earn money. However, tantra is not that. It is not to do with normal relationships; it is concerned with the spiritual relationship. The meaning of the word 'tantra' come from two words: *tanoti* – *tan* means 'to expand' – and *trayati* – *tra* means 'to liberate'. Therefore, the expansion of consciousness and liberation of the hidden dormant potentials is the meaning of *tantra*.

Yoga's origin in tantra

There are five branches of tantra. One branch of tantra is yoga, and therefore it can be said that the entire branch of yoga is tantra. It is the same family or lineage. The father is tantra and yoga is the son. This is how it originally started. The tantric and vedic literatures are ancient literatures; the subject of yoga was developed by tantra and later on it was incorporated in the vedic tradition.

The theory behind the development of yoga is that each human being is endowed with the faculties of intelligence, rationality and emotion, and that these expressions of life can be cultivated, harmonized and developed. Yoga came about as a process of realizing the mind, managing the emotions and managing the physical states even under conditions of distress and disease. In the course of time, yoga was separated from the tantric tradition and made into an independent subject. However, despite it being an independent subject today, it is still a tantric practice.

With regard to tantric practices, yoga nidra and trataka are tantric practices, they are not vedic practices; the pratyahara and dharana systems are derived from tantra. Furthermore, if you have had the chance to read *Vijnana Bhairava Tantra* you will find that it contains one hundred and twenty-one practices of dharana. That means that the entire concept of dharana and pratyahara found in ashtanga yoga is pure tantra.

The 5 'M's of tantra

People have to first remove the confusion from their mind that tantra is a sexual practice. One of the major treatises of tantra, *Kularnava Tantra*, states clearly that if by drinking wine it is possible to attain realization, everyone who drinks wine would be realized. If through the sexual act it is possible to attain realization, all householders would be realized. If by eating meat it is possible to attain liberation, all non-vegetarians would be in a better position than vegetarians to attain that realization. Like this, it goes on and on, which

indicates that the tantric ideas that people have adhered to today are incorrect.

The five 'M's of tantra are: *matsya*, fish; *mamsa*, meat, *mudra*, grain, *maithuna*, union, and *madya*, drinking. People have taken them literally; however, they are only symbolic indications of a sadhana that needs to be perfected. For example, it says in the tantric literature that two fish have to be controlled and digested. What are these two fish? In this context, fish represents the inhalation and exhalation, not the fish that you eat. However, no book on tantra in the West has ever said that *matsya*, fish, means the breathing process.

Similarly, with *madya*, wine. Drinking wine to become intoxicated is not tantra. Wine represents the nectar that drops from bindu. In yoga, we generally hear about the seven major chakras or psychic centres: mooladhara, swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddhi, ajna and sahasrara. However, in hatha yoga there are many other minor chakras or sub-psychic centres mentioned, a few of which are important. One is *lalana* chakra, which is located at the throat and another is *bindu* chakra, which is located at the point at the top and back of the head where the hair curls and where people in India keep a tuft of hair growing. It says in the hatha yoga literature that with the awakening of bindu a particular hormone is secreted, and that hormone has been named *amrita*, ambrosia, in Sanskrit.

It is said that for one to attain immortality, where the body does not decay and old age is overcome, the *amrita* that falls from bindu has to be retained in *lalana* chakra. If, however, the nectar drops below *lalana* into the region of manipura, the digestive fire burns it and decay takes place. In our life it is being consumed by manipura and so we are subject to death and decay. *Madya* in tantra means the ability to retain the *amrit* in *lalana* and thus attain immortality and the intoxication, the high of consciousness. No book ever written on tantra in the West has said this about *madya*, wine.

Likewise, for the other 'M's of tantra. *Maithuna*, believed to be the green card for sexuality, is not that. *Maithuna* is the union of the five pranas that are flowing in different directions in the body. These pranas have to be united; and when they become one, *mahaprana*, the union with spirit takes place. *Maithuna* is the ascent of kundalini and the merger of this *shakti* or energy, which rises from mooladhara to sahasrara, with *Shiva* or consciousness. No book has ever mentioned this. This is taken directly from the *Kularnava Tantra*. Just as many people describe the *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali as a highly respected book on yoga, in the same manner, *Kularnava Tantra* is recognized as an authority on tantra.

Similarly, different images and symbols have been used by tantra, which have been misinterpreted by people around the world. Tantra has been conveyed more for commercial gain than for any spiritual development. Those people who have written about tantra have never practised tantra; they have simply taken ten books and then compiled and presented their own idea. Any book found in the market about tantra is disqualified if it speaks of the carnal aspect as being the predominant factor in tantra.

Kaula tantra for householders

Kaula tantra is another branch in tantra; *kaula tantra* means 'the tantra which is followed in a household'. This tantra is commonly known as the left-hand tantra; however, there is no such thing as left-hand tantra. The actual name is kaula tantra – the tantric disciplines that one lives in one's house with one's family. In kaula tantra it is mentioned that during the sexual act you have to maintain awareness and control passion. There has to be a meditative awareness. It is not a relationship between husband and wife, or a relationship between partners based on carnal love and passion; it is more a meditative union between two people, between husband and wife. Sexual union happens in every household; however, in normal situations the approach is distorted. In the tantric situation, the sexual union between

husband and wife becomes a meditative act that frees one from the hooks or tentacles of passion, attachment, desire, need, and so on.

Although there are hundreds of systems within kaula tantra, this is just one example of how it is a separate tantra. There is also tantra that is practised with children. When I say tantra which is practised with children, it does not mean child pornography or any such thing; please, be clear about that. It is a sadhana in which the children are taught mantras and are given yantras to concentrate upon in order to develop their own awareness, consciousness, mind, intelligence and creativity.

At a conference at the UNESCO, a discussion started with a friend, a respected and acknowledged doctor, about how to use the tantric practices to improve the intelligence of children. From that discussion a book was later created and published, and given to various schools. The book incorporated pictures and images of yantras. Research was done on the effect of yantras on children's concentration and state of mind. Before the school sessions started, after the main assembly when the children would go to their classrooms, they were given the yantra colouring book and asked to colour it in for ten minutes. The results were outstanding. This was only one part of the research experiment; however, it illustrates how yantras, mandalas and mantras are used to awaken the potential in children.

Today people are doing this on a social scale; however originally it used to happen in the home. The father and mother would teach their children the use of mantras and yantras, and that is how it became part of the kaula tantra, the tantra practised at home. In this manner, there is tantra for children, tantra for the family, tantra for people who are single, tantra for people who seek spiritual upliftment and illumination, and tantra for people who wish to develop their inner skills. Tantra is a vast subject. Although the question was about yoga, the essence and purity of tantra needs to be clear. It is a pure subject to uplift human consciousness.

Is it possible to be absolutely in the present or do we always live in memories?

Memories certainly play an important part in our life; yet, people do not know how to use those memories to improve themselves. For people today, memory has become a storehouse of impressions. However, according to Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*, memory is not a storehouse of impressions; it is a *vritti*, a modification of the mind. This *vritti*, if it is managed properly and controlled properly, allows you to derive experiences and inspirations to improve the present. People think about the future, yet the future is always unknown. The present is what you are living, the past is what you have lived and you do not know what will happen to you tomorrow. Therefore, the area of human interaction is mainly in the past and in the present. The past gives you the experience and, if you consider memory to be a *vritti* and not merely a storehouse where all the good and bad impressions are stored, the present gives you the opportunity to improve upon that experience. Therefore, yoga treats memory, *smriti*, as a *vritti* of mind.

Generally people identify with their memories, and those memories indicate either our attractions or repulsions. If someone abuses you today, it will remain in your memory – thirty years later if you happen to come across that person, what memory will come? The memory of that abuse. People who come to the ashram have good, positive and uplifting experiences and perhaps some depressing experiences, too. However, when they remember being in the ashram, which one will be stronger and more powerful? Usually, it is not the good, which uplifted them, rather the bad, which put them down. It is a normal human reaction.

Identify with sattwa

How is it that people who have been friends for life can, in one situation, become enemies? What about all the good association and connection that was experienced before? Gone. Due to one circumstance, one situation. All the good

that was cultivated as friends is destroyed by one sentence; and it is that sentence which hangs on with people until the end of their days. This is the tamasic nature of the mind. You want the good and the beautiful, yet you identify with the bad. You want what is beautiful, what is good, but you do not identify with that. You only want it; you only desire it. Twenty years of goodness goes instantly in half an hour of aggression. This is a clear indication that although people desire sattwa, purity and goodness, their identification is with tamas. This is part of smriti, the memory that comes to the surface and is used by people to justify their tamasic behaviour.

You should try to think of your actual memories of your own past experiences as a vritti so that you can derive the best from it. If you can identify with the goodness of the past, the great times that you have shared with others, that memory will be an inspiration. Today, that memory will connect two people no matter how far apart they are and there will always be a close connection with that person. This is what has to be done to develop your present life. However, if you live in the past, ignore the present and worry about the future, you do not get anywhere.

People do not get anywhere as they are continuously thinking, 'This happened to me there, this is happening to me here, that happened to me there, that happened to me here.' People are living in the past. Many times elderly people talk about the golden, olden days. They are stuck in those memories, which they consider to be the golden days of their life. Why is today not a golden day? It is and it can become brilliant and golden, provided you know how to derive the best from your own memories and experiences. You do not have to dwell upon the past and abuse the future or the present. You can take a sankalpa to wait for your golden days in the future rather than believing that you have gone through the golden days in your youth.

Just be in the present moment, not in the past and not in the future. Enjoy and learn from the present. Receive

guidance from past experiences but why think about what has happened and why think about what is going to happen tomorrow? In life, you have to always improve the present moment.

What is the difference between controlling an emotion and suppressing it?

When you build a dam and the water has to flow out, you control the flow of water; however, if you want to suppress the flow of water, you close the gate. Here the idea is clear. I have come across many parents who tell their children, “Don’t cry, don’t cry. You are a boy, you are a man – only women cry.” It is a common statement, especially in the West. To say, “Do not cry,” is suppressing the emotion. If somebody cries, there is an outlet for that emotion, yet you are telling your children, “Do not cry.” That is suppression. When I lived abroad in my formative years and saw situations like this, I used to call the kid and say, “Go to the room and cry as much as you want. Go and cry, no problem – just don’t tell your father that you have cried.”

Controlled release and stopping the expression altogether, these are two different things. Controlled release is always better. What is the meaning of controlled release? Think twice before you act. Do not act in a rash manner; know that what you are going to do is the right thing.

Self-expression

There are some people who are so overwhelmed by their emotions and feelings that they begin to do crazy things. When you completely stop all natural expression of the energy of the mind, another outlet has to be provided for what is being built up inside – or it comes out in future as aggression, insecurity, fear, complexes and inhibitions. Many people suffer from an inferiority complex or a dilapidated self-image; however, if we allow ourselves to express our emotions in a controlled manner then the heart is clean, the mind is clean and there is nothing bottled up inside.

There is also the other extreme, for example, after a meditation class people are so elated that they hug each other. However, the peace and happiness that is experienced within has to be maintained. Expression of emotion in this manner does not lead one anywhere in spiritual life. If you are able to maintain the peace, calmness and beauty that you have experienced at that time, and cultivate and nurture it, the consciousness changes. On the other hand, if from a high state you come down and begin to express your happiness, you convert that transcendental experience into a gross, physical experience.

There is nothing wrong with hugging, but it is simply an expression of one's feelings; it is not a spiritual act. It is the play of the mind and emotions – when they come together they involve the body in it; however, when emotion is pure and separate from the mind then God becomes involved. That is the difference. The outlet of an emotion is necessary, a controlled outlet; not one extreme of hugging the thousands of people that you come across or the other extreme, “No, I am a yogi totally detached from the world. I have nothing to do with anybody.” One is out of control and the other is suppressing.

What is the meaning of emotion? Energy in motion. Energy in motion is e-motion. When you cry, you experience the raw force of crying. When there is aggression, you experience the raw force of aggression, uncontrollable and unguided. At that time, wisdom does not work; the knowledge of right and wrong is cast aside; everything good that can happen to you is forgotten. The mind cannot control the emotion. If somebody is angry, later on they feel guilty, ‘Why did I become angry? Why did I not control my anger?’ This is a clear indication that the mind does not rule the emotion. When you are feeling guilty, when you are feeling fear, when you are feeling insecurity, the mind has no role to play. At that time, the mind only justifies what the emotions are doing. It does not control them.

Controlled expression

Still, the mind has to control the expression of emotions, just as you control the flow of water from a tap. You use as much water as you require, whether to fill a glass, a jug or a bucket. You also control the force of the flow. If you open the tap fully for half a cup of water, a gush of water will come out, splashing everywhere. You control it by adjusting the tap and the flow of water so that it does not splash everywhere. The idea is the same with regard to a controlled expression of emotion. Often when people express their emotions it is like the tap being fully open and water splashing everywhere. One or two percent of water remains in the container and the rest is splashed all around. As Swami Sivananda used to say, “Eat a little, drink a little, sleep a little, talk a little . . .” In the same manner, ‘A little happiness, a little fear, a little insecurity, a little compassion, a little kindness’. Everything should be in a little form, which means do not over do it.

Reflection and wisdom

How does one bring the mind in? That can happen through meditation. When you lie down in your bed at night, review the day. Recall every moment of the day that you have lived from the morning until night. See the whole day like a movie in your mind. See your interactions with people – how you responded, how you reacted, how you behaved. If you find that you have had conflict or strife with somebody, reflect upon that and try to discover if there is a better way to deal with the situation the next time it happens. Gradually, the meditative and the reflective awareness will control the flow of emotion.

Reflection is a useful sadhana to ensure that the mind is the guiding force. However, which of the four compartments of the mind – *manas*, *buddhi*, *chitta* or *ahamkara*? It is not through the ‘mind’, rather it is through *manas*, reflection, and through *buddhi*, wisdom and rationality, that you are able to control the emotions. If *ahamkara* or ego comes in, the emotions will not be controlled, rather it will be like

feeding fuel to the fire, and the same with chitta. Ahamkara and *chitta*, ego and memory, will feed fuel to the fire. On the other hand, manas and buddhi, reflection and wisdom, will manage the fire. That is the only way.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna says, “He who sees inaction in action and action in inaction is wise among men. He is a yogi who has performed all action.” Could you please explain what is meant by this statement?

Generally, people think action means activity and inaction means no activity. This general concept is wrong. In the *Bhagavad Gita* it says, “One who can see inaction in action and action in inaction is a yogi.” The meaning of this is that everything in this world is action; the entire world is karma and we are individual units of karma. This karma is happening continuously, guiding and directing our life, our mind, our body. You may not be doing anything, just sitting quietly in one corner of the room; however, the body is still doing its karma. You are all attached to the result, the outcome of your karmas, yet the body is performing its karma without you even knowing it. The heart is beating, digestion is happening, metabolic processes and respiration continue to take place – these are karmas happening.

Expectation causes karma

You associate karma with your activity, something that you do with your senses, body, mind and emotions; and therefore, if you do not use your body or your senses, you feel you are inactive. No. It is the detachment from the effect or the result of the karmas that is ‘seeing the inaction in action’. Sweeping is not a karma, sweeping is an act. Drinking is an act, sleeping is an act – they are not classified as karmas. *Karma* is the association of the mind with what is happening, and this association gives birth to the expectation that a certain outcome will result. You go to work in the office with the expectation that at the end of the month you will receive your pay cheque. If you knew that you were not going to get

the pay cheque, you would not go to the office. There is an expectation that your karma will result in a certain outcome.

The following is an example of action and inaction. A farmer ploughs the field, prepares the soil, plants the seeds, looks after them and goes through all the necessary effort; however, after this there comes a time when the farmer has to sit back and allow nature to do its work. It is not solely the effort of the farmer that makes the produce. He prepares the ground; he gets the seeds and plants them, yet after a certain point his job is finished and nature has to take over. What will happen if there is a drought? Nothing grows; everything will be destroyed and he will have to start again. What will happen when there is a good crop, and he sells it to the market and gets money for it? Again, he has to start the same process. The difference is that when he does not receive anything he feels that his efforts have been wasted. It is not due to him; rather, it is due to the situation, nature. Conversely, if he gets a good result and earns money, he feels that his efforts have been justified.

When you feel that all your effort has gone to waste and you have to start again, a form of depression sets in, and when you earn a lot, a form of elation sets in. That is only due to your association. If you do not allow depression to set in, or elation to set in, and you continue to do your work with the understanding of 'Let Thy will be done', then that will be action by you and at the same time inaction by you as you are not attaching yourself to the result. Then you are free from the effect of either depression or elation. Therefore, 'one who sees action in inaction and inaction in action is a yogi' means that the one who is able to separate himself from the results of the action finds peace.

What is the meaning of karma sannyasa and the Saraswati tradition?

They are two different things. The Saraswati tradition is a tradition within the sannyasa system. Many years ago, in the seventh century, a brilliant person took birth, and he came

with a mission. He was so brilliant that at the age of six he left home and became a sannyasin, a wandering mendicant. His name was Adi Shankaracharya. At that time, there were many of changes happening in the religious and spiritual environment in this country, and he became the catalyst to unite the dissipating traditions. He collected the recluses, renunciates, sadhus and sannyasins, and made an order called Dashnami Sannyasa. *Dash* means ‘ten’, *nam* means ‘name’ – the ten names, ten different traditions converged into one.

The Dashnami tradition

Saraswati is the name of one of the ten different traditions. The lineage of Paramahansa Yogananda is the Giri tradition. The lineage of Swami Vivekananda is the Puri tradition. Our tradition is the Saraswati tradition. Each tradition: Vanam, Aranyam, Ashraman, Bharati, Teertha, Sagar, Saraswati, had a specific role to play. The Saraswati tradition was given the job of maintaining and propagating the *vidya*, knowledge. We belong to that tradition and today there is a demand for this knowledge and therefore, we are out in the open. However, if we are not needed or wanted tomorrow, we will go back to where we came from and you will not find the Saraswati tradition in society again. We will go back to our places in the mountains, and that is how the traditions have survived until now. They have not been destroyed like so many other traditions in the world.

In India, despite invasions and thousands of years of foreign rule, the traditions of sannyasa have remained intact, so much so that nothing can change the sannyasa culture of this country. The Moguls, Muslims, invaded the country. For around eight hundred years they ruled India; however, they could only convert a few, whereas in other countries entire nations were converted to Islam. The British ruled India, yet they could not convert the people into Christians. We maintained our traditions, we did not change our views or our ideas. In other places entire nations were converted,

traditions were lost and systems were destroyed. From China and Mongolia Genghis Khan and so many others have come; however, they could not make headway in this country as the traditions, the *paramparas*, were strong. When the invaders were around we went away into the mountains. When they left, we came back and revived the old traditions, the parampara and the vidya. That is the nature of the Saraswati tradition. We are the preservers of knowledge, disseminators of knowledge. Saraswati is the goddess of learning. It is because of our Saraswati tradition that today we know about tantra, the Vedas, the yogas and the Samkhyas. We know about the different philosophical schools that existed, and they are equally vibrant today as they were in the past.

In the same way, the Puris were renunciates who lived in the cities, and they continued to live there and inspire people in times of difficulty. They continued doing what they were doing, because ultimately emancipation was their birthright. Giris were renunciates of the mountains. Vanams were the renunciates of the jungles and forests. Aranyas were the renunciates of the forest. Ashramans were renunciates who managed and ran the gurukuls, therefore the name 'Ashraman'. Like this, the ten different traditions, which converged in sannyasa, had an important role to play in the preservation of the eternal knowledge.

Sannyasa

The question was also on karma sannyasa. First, understand the meaning of sannyasa. *Sam* means total and *nyasa* means trust. Sannyasa is a trust, where you place your abilities for the welfare of humanity or other people. Buddha used to say, "Oh, bhikshu, keep on walking for the good of many, for the welfare of many." That is sannyasa, where we do not have a double life. Other people have a double life; they have the spiritual life and they have the social life. Sometimes the spiritual life and the social life come into conflict with each other; that is the price you have to pay for leading a double life. Sannyasins do not lead double lives, they lead one

life. There is no confusion and no conflict. When you put yourself, your abilities, your qualities, strengths and wisdom in a trust for the welfare and benefit of many, then that is known as sannyasa. To come to the point of sannyasa, where you are able to totally devote yourself to the upliftment of consciousness universally, you have to undergo the training to know yourself and to develop efficiency, perfection and objectivity in life. Karma sannyasa is a process that leads you to that.

Karma sannyasa

According to the concept of karma as mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita* (5:11) – *Yoginah karma kurvanti sangam tyaktvaatmashuddhaye* – “A yogi performs actions free from attachment for inner purification.” That is the idea of karma sannyasa. This idea from the *Bhagavad Gita* was converted into the sadhana of karma sannyasa by Sri Swamiji. Until then nobody gave karma sannyasa initiation. This is the only place in the world that gives karma sannyasa and jignasu sannyasa. Nowhere in the world, even in Indian ashrams, does the *parampara*, the tradition, exist like it exists here within our tradition. Jignasu sannyasa is given for a person to know oneself and to reflect upon oneself, and karma sannyasa is given so that one can become responsible for one’s actions, which leads to the betterment of human expressions and behaviours in life.

Ancient tradition

Sannyasa is the most ancient tradition in the world. The reference comes right from the vedic and tantric times, when originally the sannyasins were known as *yatis*, people who lived in isolated and secluded places and never met with other people in society. From this the word ‘yeti’ has come. A yeti is not an animal or a giant man; it is a person, a recluse who is living in the mountains. Indians will never question it; they know ‘yeti’ means recluse. Naturally outsiders will ask, “Who is this yeti? I don’t know your tradition.” Gradually

stories build up; that they are big, hairy people, this people, that People. Photographs show a figure moving in the distance, and then suddenly somebody sees some footprints. "Whose footprints are these? They must be the yeti's footprints." They are bear prints, but people say, "That is a yeti." The whole thing has been distorted. There is no such thing as an 'abominable snowman'. Yetis are simply poor guys trying to lead a quiet life and who are happy living in that manner. Not one abominable snowman has been found despite the amount of people who go trekking and despite all our technological advancement, GPS's, GPRS's and satellites. The stories are merely human inventions, which is why they are called stories.

There are many other old customs that people have forgotten, nevertheless today they continue to exist in this part of the world, in the mountains, in the jungles and forests. The stories are incredible and definitely this land has been blessed by God at sometime, for still despite everything, all the chaos outside, there is peace inside. You see chaos in society, yet you will find peace in the mind and heart of a beggar. Here, if a beggar does not get five rupees and has to live hungry for one day, that beggar will say, "This is God's wish for me." In New York, money will be taken from you at gun-point or knife-point and you might even be killed for it. There the beggars do not think, "This is what God wants for me."

—9 January 2008

What is the purpose of organization and discipline?

People think that organization and discipline relate to external actions, but in reality, they reflect the state of the mind. Organization and discipline represent a balanced behaviour of mind. In order to know how balanced the mind is, just take a look at your own bedroom and you will discover that your room reflects your mind. If the clothes are thrown on the bed, if the plates are put on one side without any care, if the almirah has become a dumping place for your clothes

and other items, that shows the state of your own mind and mental character. If you are habituated to maintaining your room properly, it reflects a better mental character. It is not a big thing for me to know somebody's mind and how they are; I simply have to look at their room, nothing more than that. I do not even have to talk to the person to know what they are like, I just look at their bags, how they pack things and the items they carry with them. If you look at that, you know what they are like, because mental behaviour, mental organization and discipline are always reflected in the outer behaviour.

Here is another example: it is a common situation that can happen to any one of us any time. You receive a plate full of five, six, seven items of food, and each of those items looks tasty and palatable to you. Now, you look at all that and you feel so happy thinking, 'Oh, food of my liking has come finally and not the dry roti and the saltless dal', and in that moment of greedy elation you want to consume all the items together. You have a bit from here, a bit from there, a bit from here, a bit from there and the interesting part is that while you are picking up one thing your eyes are looking at something else and your thoughts are thinking about the third or fourth item that is on the plate. Try it one day and you will see what your behaviour is. That type of behaviour indicates blocks in the free flow of natural mental discipline, the state of mental organization. If I have to eat the same food I will eat one item first and enjoy it, then the second item, then the third, then the fourth, because I know that those items will not run away anywhere. I do not have to take a bite from each item in the first round. Why not enjoy one item to its fullest and then move on to the second item?

This is an example of how the mind, even in the normal little situations, is so disorganized that it cannot make up its own mind. This reflects a lack of mental organization and inner discipline. Organization means first defining the priorities, then defining the sequence in which the work will be performed – defining the sequence for the expression of your creativity. This happens when you have attained

some knowledge and awareness of your own mental states. For this reason, yoga begins with *anushasana*, observation and management of the arising mental behaviours. When the mind has been pacified the outer environment is also organized spontaneously.

—10 February 2008

How not to be self-conscious?

To be aware of one's self is a natural human trait that emanates through ego; it is an expression of the ego principle. Not arrogance, not the bloated ego, but the normal ego that represents the human identity, the 'I-ness'. To project oneself in a good light is an instinct, just as fear, hunger and sleep are instincts. In the same manner, to be self-conscious is an instinct. When we become aware of ourselves, when we become self-conscious, our behaviour changes. We try to project ourselves in a different way, in a better way. To be self-conscious or not to be self-conscious is not the question, for everyone is self-conscious. How we perceive that self-perception is the actual question. It can be taken two ways. If it is perceived with a yogic attitude, then we are always trying to improve our expressions; and if we do it with a normal attitude, then we are trying to project ourselves. That is the difference.

There are some people who are incapable of taking a firm stand because they are afraid that the other person will see them in a bad light. They always want to be seen as loving, compassionate and kind, and they will ignore all the systems and disciplines in order to express this. That is negative self-esteem. If they are only trying to highlight one thing by hiding their weaknesses or their shortcomings, and the thought in their mind is that people should see them in a good light, that is negative self-esteem. Positive self-esteem is the conviction that there is always scope for change, improvement and adjustment. That is positive self-awareness, and that is the difference between a yogi and

a bhogi. After all, the mind stuff is the same in everyone. However, as a yogi one tries to fine-tune something, and as a bhogi one tries to enforce one's self-esteem and projecting one's self in a different way. In answer to the question: there is no harm in being self-conscious, but it has to be done in a positive manner so that you improve.

How many people are aware of their motivation? People are aware of sensorial and sensual motivations, yet not the inner motivation that makes them tick. Many people do not know the way to change; they are stuck on one idea. If you are not stuck on an idea then you always find ways to improve the environment, the situation and yourself so that everything is compatible; you adjust to events and circumstances. If you have the ability to adjust then self-esteem is not a problem. Self-esteem becomes a problem when you cannot adjust and you see even a mild adjustment as a threat to your own personal self-image.

Life is not about the intellect only, 'Why this, why that, why this, why that?' Life is also about adjustment, and if you can adjust in life then the intellect has no role to play as it does not get an opportunity to ask questions, you simply act. For example, when it is cold you put on warm clothes. When it is warm, you put on light clothes; it happens naturally and there is no need to think about it. However, if you think, 'Gee, this is a nice jumper. I'll wear it also in the summer,' then you are a show off. Then that is your problem, your head-trip and your projection. Similarly in winter, if you try to walk around in light clothes just to show that you are strong enough to bear the cold and one hour later you are in the room sneezing and sniffing.

If you are a realist then nothing is a problem. Yet who in this world is a realist? In practice, only masters have become realists, because they have been able to go beyond their own hang-ups; they are able to observe reality as it is and adjust to it as it comes. Those people who are caught in their own hang-ups are people who care about self-esteem, prestige, and so on.

Once there was a swami. He received an instruction to tell somebody to leave the ashram within one hour. When the swami received the instruction he started to tremble. He could not speak and another swami was sent to convey the message. The weakness of the swami was that he was too caught up in his own mental hang-ups, and because of that he was unable to say to the person, “Look, you have to leave within one hour.” He was standing there trembling, thinking, ‘What will happen? Other people will see me telling this person to get out. This person will have a negative opinion about me.’ If that is the mentality then there is no hope. Yet, if you are willing to take the step to see reality, what is just and appropriate, then self-consciousness has no relevance in life. The word ‘self-conscious’ is only a word in which we hide from our own weaknesses, and then we do not connect with our strengths.

—28 July 2008

What is gurukul lifestyle course?

Gurukul lifestyle is something that is not commonly known. People believe that gurukul means staying in the ashram and training oneself to develop or evolve mentally, emotionally, spiritually and psychically. However, I find that these definitions of gurukul are incomplete as they do not indicate what happens in a gurukul. The word *gurukul* literally means ‘family of the guru’. The second word is ‘lifestyle’ and the third word is ‘course’. Whenever people read ‘Gurukul Lifestyle Course’, they immediately latch onto the word ‘course’ and believe that they will be taught practices to discover themselves, and that they will learn how to meditate for six hours to become pious and pure and live like a prophet without flaws and faults. However, they missed the first two words: gurukul and lifestyle. Let us look at human nature first before we try to understand gurukul lifestyle.

Human nature in general is conditioned. There are many impressions on the blank pages of your mind. Just as

in a passport, when you enter a country you are stamped 'entered', and when you leave you are stamped 'exited'; in the same manner, in your minds different circumstances, events and routines leave impressions. The impressions gained in the gurukul, if they are looked at from an objective and realistic point of view, are the most important impressions that carry one through life. Sri Swamiji has said many times that, "All my academic learning in school and college has not helped me in my life, but the practical training that I received in the ashram is what has helped." If you can see the validity of these sentences, I would say you have understood in part what is gurukul; and if you have not understood, you still have to continue your learning to understand what is gurukul.

The purpose of gurukul is to open the mind, whereas the purpose of yoga is to focus the mind. When you practise yoga, you learn how to focus the mind: in pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, pranayama and asana, for example. In the gurukul the mind is not focused, it is broadened. This opening of the mind happens when you are exposed to different situations and when you are willing to derive the right experience, which leads to excellence within you.

Most of the time, people prefer not to open the mind due to conditioning, conviction, self-identity, ego and limitations. These come to the forefront and they stop the mind from opening. A clear example are the conflicts, misunderstandings and fights that people have with each other. The so-called 'knowledgeable' people, the intellectuals, the 'bright and brilliant people' are unable to manage their reactions. Sometimes anger sets in, sometimes frustration, sometimes rejection, sadness, self-pity, arrogance. If you fight with somebody, if you misunderstand somebody, it leads to a reactive response. At that time, you only want to impose your own ego and are not willing to see the appropriateness or the rightness of the action. That is an indication of how the mind shuts down. Everyone has gone through similar experiences and most are unable to manage their reactions.

Whenever I see a person reacting, I know that the mind has gone wrong. That is the truth. Those people cannot move even half a millimetre forward that day because they have lost control. I see people using harsh words and duping themselves by thinking that they are right, forgetting that they are shutting down the mind and going against the principles of yoga, ashram, sannyasa and gurukul when they react. When you do not try to understand and appreciate each person's role, the feeling and thought comes that, 'This person is trying to bug me'. This leads to the downfall of the individual and consciousness. This is a human trait.

Facing our shortcomings

In the gurukul, when you expose yourself to different situations and events you have to learn how to deal with them in a positive, creative and constructive state of mind. The more you can adjust and adapt to a situation, the more your mind becomes free from its own limitations and hang-ups; the mind is able to come out of its shell. Naturally, the mind has to move from its dark experiences to luminous experiences; the tamasic mentality has to change into a sattwic mentality, the conditioned mentality has to change into an open mentality. This is the most difficult training for a sadhaka.

If you look at the stories of people who have made a mark in this world you will find that all those people have faced difficult situations with a smiling face and not a single frown. Such people have made a difference in their own lives and that is the important thing. To make a difference in someone else's life is not a big thing. If somebody is sick or hungry you can help that person, yet if you are not aware of yourself, you still have to go through that education. After all, a child knows how to speak before he or she goes to primary school. If you then go to school, you will not tell your teacher, "I don't need to learn A-B-C-D because I can already speak in it." In the same manner, what you know is not enough.

Live what you know

You have to live what you know. Ask yourself the question: Do you live what you know? If your answer is no, then you have failed in your life. Where has the effort been to rise beyond the pettiness of mind? Rather, every effort has been to impose your identity, position and grip power. There is no spiritual advancement. You can shave your head, you can wear geru, you can claim the identity of a sannyasin; however, you will never be a sannyasin. You will never move even a few steps forward if you do not know how to live what you know. And to know how to live, that is where lifestyle comes in.

People think that realization and peace comes when you close your eyes. No. When you close your eyes, when you meditate, you are only releasing the stress of the mind; you are not experiencing, attaining or striving for peace. When people meditate it is just like the ostrich that hides its head in the ground, with its wide behind sticking out, thinking that nobody can see it. What has to be done? Well, instead of hiding the head inside the ground you simply keep it up, look around and enjoy. The trait of the *sadhaka*, the spiritual aspirant, is to not be introvert. The spiritual aspirant's trait is to be as extrovert as the mind allows him to be. In this context, extrovert does not mean dissipated or distracted awareness, extrovert means homogenous awareness of everything. For example, a person walks by and somebody asks, "Did this person pass here?" If you answer, "No, I didn't see anybody", where were you at that time?

Most of the time people follow the trail of the mind and the senses; this creates stress. Meditation is useful for that. Yet, when you stop following the trail of the senses and the mind and become the *drashtha*, the witness, then everything is seen in your field of vision. You have come to the ashram to live gurukul lifestyle for that. Otherwise, you would be happy with your own lifestyle: having breakfast in bed, going out with friends, watching movies, enjoying and living a comfortable and happy life. You could have done that, you

had that option; yet you chose to come to experiment with something different – the lifestyle here.

Foundations in life

For young people, with all your passions, expectations and desires, the meditative and reclusive lifestyle is not conducive. As Sri Swamiji has stated, ‘You can go to the Himalayas in search of peace, yet you will not find peace, as you are going with your set of baggage: your mind, feelings, emotions, expectations, thoughts, desires, passions and beliefs. You are not leaving anything behind; you are taking the whole lot with you. So how could you find peace there? However, if you are able to manage yourself and manage the mind, then even in the middle of the market you will not hear any noise and you will be at absolute peace with yourself.’ This statement is not merely a sentence to be written on a piece of paper and stuck on the wall, it is a sadhana that you have to practise.

The gurukul lifestyle provides you with an opportunity to discover ways by which you can manage your reactions and responses by subjecting yourself to different situations. After all, that is the foundation for development, growth and success in life.

—30 July 2008

What is the foundation for growth, development and success in life?

In my understanding, there are four foundations for development, growth and success in life:

Conviction

The first is conviction. You have to know the nature of life and the nature of life is performance, *karma*. Life without karma, life without action is no life. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna says to Arjuna that the entire experience of life is an experience of action, right from our birth until our

death. When we involve ourselves in action, our mind plays tricks, and when we fall prey to the tricks of the mind, we subject ourselves to the experiences of success and failure. Corresponding to that, a particular mood comes up of either happiness or dejection. They both represent a state of mind that is identifying with an experience. Happiness identifies with a pleasant experience and suffering indicates a negative experience. So happiness or success, suffering or failure, are the outcomes of identification with action and with the world: with our aspirations, expectations, motivations and desires.

The most important attitude in all this is the conviction that 'I can achieve'. If one has that mentality and belief, it will lead to development and growth. People either become over-achievers or under-achievers, but most of the time people identify too much with their responses and expectations, and there is less identification with the process of achieving. The process of achieving is enforced with the conviction: 'I can'. Once you know that you can then nothing is impossible. How do you spell the word 'impossible?' I-M-possible, and a person with conviction knows that nothing is impossible. The only trick is that you have to connect with a positive frame of mind.

You can connect with a negative frame of mind with conviction, just as you can connect with a positive state of mind with conviction. If your conviction relates to a negative or destructive state of mind, the outcome will be negative and destructive. On the other hand, if you associate conviction with the positive, the outcome will be auspicious. Without wisdom, conviction can be detrimental. With wisdom, conviction becomes a force that transcends all human barriers. Therefore, conviction with positivity and with wisdom, the conviction that 'I can achieve', is the first quality, and this leads to the attainment of excellence and perfection in life.

Participation and involvement

The second foundation is participation and involvement, and this is in continuation with the first. If life is karma – if

for material gain we have to perform karma, if for spiritual gain we have to perform karma, if for mental peace and harmony we have to perform karma – then our participation with karma has to be total. There cannot be rejection of karma of any kind, at any time, as karma is the nature of life. The more you participate with karma, the more you interact with life. The problem is that people do not see karma as a way to improve their own nature, skills and personality – but once this understanding comes then every action becomes a pleasurable action, even the most routine one.

Some people say they are tired of routines. People who say that have no inclination or understanding of what karma is or what karma yoga is. For them participation in life has become routine, and when something becomes routine it stagnates and you get bored. Yet if every moment, if every action is seen as a chance to improve one's skills, one's nature and one's personality, then no matter how many times you do something, the feeling will be that it is being done for the first and last time, and that you are giving your best to it. Even though you may do the same thing every day for twenty years, each day will be a new day and each involvement will be as though it is the first and the last involvement. And if it is going to be the first and last, then give it your best shot. Why say, "I will do better tomorrow" or "I will deal with it next time"? That indicates separation from involvement and participation. If you put things off to the next time, that means you are not interested, and whatever the action is, it feels heavy, like a burden. Opportunities for growth, development and success come if there is absolute and total participation.

Trust

The third foundation is trust. Trust in what? In every person's life there is someone who inspires them, who encourages them to discover something better, and trust has to be in that person. It can be the guru, a friend, or a location where the environment is conducive and where you

feel free. Any place or person in which you are able to feel that inspiration becomes the object in which you can place your trust. After all, even places become centres of energy, *tirthas*, where most of the internal desires can be attained. We place our trust in *tirthas*, in images and forms of God, or in the form of the guru or some friend who inspires us, knowing that this person will not let us down. When we have that level of trust the flame of inspiration keeps burning all the time. With the loss of trust, this flame of inspiration and motivation dies down. Therefore, trust is another important ingredient: trust in those people who inspire us and who are models to be emulated.

It is said that everyone needs a hero in their life. You choose your hero according to your preferences, needs and mentality; but the ultimate hero in this world is not the Bollywood star or a person who lives in some ashram. The ultimate hero of this world is God, divinity – and the person through whom the force, the energy of God flows to illuminate your own dark, dull corners of mind is the person worthy of your trust. This trust has to be preserved and protected from other influences. When you have a piece of gold jewellery, you wear it occasionally. You do not wear it every day, showing off to everyone that you have this piece of golden jewellery. Rather, you protect it from prying eyes and hands. You safeguard it from theft by putting it in a safe, and you only use it when there is a need to wear it. In the same manner, this trust has to be protected from other influences. Many times, I have seen that disciples mistrust their guru more than they mistrust their associates. If that is the case, then why come here? Why do you say, “Guru is my everything,” and then distrust the guru?

Trust is something that should not be taken lightly. When you have doubts and questions, really they are not in relation to the guru or teacher, but in relation to yourself. You are reflecting your own inability to comprehend, grasp and advance. You are falling prey to your own weaknesses, and as you are unable to understand your own weaknesses,

you cast aspersions on other people. Distrust is the first breakdown that happens when life deviates from its original path and goal while trust is a power which comes alive in you with purity of intention and identification with the source of inspiration.

Faith

The fourth foundation is faith. Faith in the Divine Will, in the Cosmic Will. Identifying with faith and the feeling of 'Let Thy will be done', rather than identifying with reactions and enjoyments and believing oneself to be the doer or the enjoyer. Learning to flow according to the Divine Will indicates the development of faith. Faith is not only an intellectual concept that 'I believe in this person, I have faith in this thing, I have surrendered myself to this power.' If you try to understand trust and faith with your intellect, one hundred percent failure is guaranteed, as these are not the expressions of intellect. Faith and trust are expressions of a pure and innocent heart.

Faith and trust, conviction and participation, these constitute the foundations for development and growth in life. Other things such as wisdom, awareness, discrimination and satsang are incidental. They are like the coverings on the bed. The bed is supported by four legs: the conviction that you can excel, participation with the knowledge that this is the first and the last time that you are involving yourself in something, trust and faith. These are the legs of the bed on which you lie to have a peaceful rest. These are the four foundation stones of the house in which you live, where you can express your own strengths. The other qualities are only decorations in the rooms, nothing more than that. You can decorate your room in the way that you like with this virtue, with that quality, with this understanding, with that perception; that is your choice. However, the basic foundations are conviction, participation, trust and faith.

—1 August 2008

What is the aim of yoga and life?

Different people have different aims in life. Some have said that God-realization is their aim, some have said self-realization, some samadhi and some freedom. In this way, each person, each philosopher, each master, each yogi has given an indication as to the purpose of life. These purposes have changed from time to time, as you have to remember that no answer is an eternal answer. Questions are created due to changing circumstances and solutions have to be given according to the circumstances.

In the past, when people said self-realization was the goal of life, it was true, and circumstances were able to lead one to experiencing realization. However, self-realization is not an appropriate aim for the present situation, circumstances, or even inclination of people today. Your association, your relationship with the environment, with nature and the world has to be defined first before you actually find out how to experience the higher realities of life. After all, you cannot ignore the world in which you live, just as you cannot ignore the house which you live in. You prepare your own house so that is pleasant and comfortable for yourself. In the same manner, you can consider the whole world to be a club of which you are all life members. So while you are associated with this club, what is expected of you and what do you expect from yourself? Let's start with that.

First get a grip on yourself

What is expected from us is that we should excel in whatever we do – professionally, socially, physically and psychologically. People should have a grip on situations, circumstances and events, and when people have a grip on life, their direction is clear and they can move forward without any questions or confusion. On the other hand, when the grip on situations and circumstances is not there, distress sets in, and distress becomes the cause of confusion and disharmony in life.

Globally, what does every society, every nation, every civilization aspire to? To prosper socially, to experience

peace personally, to use wisdom for the homogeneous and integrated development of life as a whole. Everything that is done is geared toward achieving or experiencing this excellence. Why do people work? For prosperity. What is everyone looking for in life? Balance and peace. What can be done to enhance the quality of life? Cultivate wisdom. This is the need of today, not samadhi. If you wanted self-realization you should have taken birth about five hundred years ago; since you have taken birth now it is the search for excellence in life that has to become the aim. The journey in yoga and in life and begins with this purpose.

Then tune in to spiritual life

Spirituality is an integral part of human experience; that cannot be denied. External success indicates one's achievement, mastery and command over a situation, an event, people or circumstances. In the same manner, one's spiritual drive indicates the development and the awakening of the inner personality. The inner personality and outer intellectual personality then merge to become one awakened personality. That is the aim of yoga: the merger or conversion of the gross material mind into a positive spiritual mind. Sage Patanjali, in his statement on yoga, says that yoga is control over the dissipated nature of mind, *chitta vritti nirodha*. Therefore, one must manage the dissipations, one must work to reorganize and restructure one's life from an external routine to an internal discipline through restraint, control and governance. It is fine-tuning the human nature and personality that, according to Sage Patanjali and other yoga exponents, becomes the path one has to walk in order to perfect yoga. This is the aim of yoga in the modern context; maintaining spiritual qualities in life is the practical aim of yoga.

Long journey of yoga

Why do people want to meditate? Why do people want to practise yoga? To access areas of the personality, mentality

and attitudes, which are at present untapped. To simply overcome frustrations, depression, anxiety, mental and psychological problems is not the aim or purpose of yoga, although it is used for that. If somebody suffers stress and tension, they practise yoga to provide an outlet and release, but that is merely one of the applications of yoga. If there is emotional, psychological or physical imbalance and distress, people come to yoga to overcome these. That is not the purpose or aim of yoga, but beyond this people have no other exposure to yoga.

Generally, people use yoga is to fulfil a personal need and to feel better; once the need has been fulfilled and there is satisfaction, then comes the wish to share it with other people. However, when yoga is shared with other people in this way, it is coming from a limited perspective. Such people do not know the full system of yoga. Someone can take aspirin to alleviate their headache and then say, "Yes, aspirin is good for a headache," however, they are only propagating one medicine; it does not mean that they know the entire medical science. In the same manner, if somebody knows the name of an asana, it does not mean that they know about yoga in its entirety. Just because people have read about yoga does not mean they know what yoga is. Yoga is something different to what most people have practised for the fulfilment of their needs; yoga is being used to help alleviate all the aches and pains in life that confront people, and nothing beyond that.

Yoga teachers have to undertake a long journey. They should experiment with themselves regarding the benefits and effects of yoga in order to share that understanding with other people. One cannot learn yoga in twenty days or one month. After all, it takes one year to learn how to read and write 'A-B-C-D' in kindergarten and in primary school. In order to develop a complete understanding of yoga, one needs to adopt yoga in life, from moment to moment.

Integral yoga

Somebody had written a question, “How do I incorporate yoga in my life when I practise yoga every morning?” The question is wrong. You do not practise yoga every morning, you are only practising asana every morning. Do you practise kundalini yoga every morning? Do you practise kriya yoga, mantra yoga, laya yoga and raja yoga every morning? No, you do not. You are only practising one aspect and you are calling that yoga. So if you are practising one or two aspects of yoga you have to apply your mind to understand how you can incorporate the other components of yoga in your life. For that ashram training and ashram education are important.

There are many yoga centres in the world where people learn much better postures than they learn here, but that is not the point. The point is that to get something beneficial from yoga, people need to learn how to incorporate it into their lives. This is where the actual training of yoga comes in. It makes no difference whether you practise for half an hour or two hours in the morning. What is important is how you are able to incorporate these practices, moment to moment, in your life, allowing them to fine-tune your behaviour, your health – physical, psychological, emotional – and give you vitality, physical energy and clarity, conviction and direction of mind.

What is the training in the ashram? Participation. You can label that participation in any way you want; whether you call it karma yoga or seva or participation in class, the names are irrelevant here. The main thing is participation, how you participate, how you are able to express yourself in different situations whilst maintaining peace of mind, clarity and creativity of thought and control of the senses. The more you participate in life, the more perfect yoga becomes in your life. The less you participate in life, when you try to escape from situations, the more you distance yourself from yoga. Even in meditation, are you trying to escape from the situation rather than acknowledging it, modifying it and making it conducive to your own development and growth?

Each form of yoga has a purpose to fulfil, each yoga has a direction; and a combination of these yogas is what eventually creates a colourful canvas of life. To improve the quality of your participation yogis have defined the method of karma yoga. To improve the quality of your intellect yogis have defined the subject of *jnana yoga*, reflection. To harmonize the dissipated, raw energies of your nature the yogis have come up with bhakti yoga. To get access to the unknown dimensions of your existence yogis have given the practices of raja yoga. To be the master of the senses and the body, yogis have come up with hatha yoga.

The true guru

The yoga system as taught by Swami Sivananda, our paramguru, was called 'integral yoga'. He did not say, "I am teaching hatha yoga," or, "I am teaching raja yoga," or "I am teaching bhakti yoga." Swami Sivananda was the first person to integrate various components of yoga, to give impulse and power to the movement of life through the practices of yoga. Many of the yoga organizations in the world today do not teach integral yoga. They only teach one type of yoga, either hatha yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga or kundalini yoga. Integral yoga is the hallmark of the Sivananda tradition, which was further developed by Swami Satyananda. In this approach everything is taken in small quantities, as indicated by Swami Sivananda in his poem:

Eat a little, drink a little.
Talk a little, sleep a little.
Mix a little, move a little,
Serve a little, rest a little.
Work a little, play a little,
Study a little, worship a little.
Do asana a little, pranayama a little,
Reflect a little, meditate a little.
Do japa a little, do kirtan a little,
Write mantra a little, have satsang a little.

It makes sense as we are not expressions of a single quality, rather we express many different qualities in life. Therefore, a holistic or integral approach for the development of the human personality should be considered the right approach to learn yoga.

From whom do you learn yoga? In the spiritual tradition, you learn from the guru, whereas in the social tradition you learn from a teacher or a professor. There is a difference between a professor, teacher, reader, lecturer and a guru. Those people who identify with social identities say, “I am a professor of yoga, I am a teacher of yoga, I am a graduate of yoga.” This indicates that their understanding is limited. What is the difference between a teacher and a guru? The teacher, whose knowledge is bookish, teaches but does not live yoga, whereas the guru lives yoga and does not teach. If you can emulate the teachings of the guru, if you can incorporate the teachings of the guru in your own life, you will have a deeper experience and realization of the whole process.

You have to accept the guru as the guru and not as a trouble-shooter, not as a consultant for family matters like marriage, divorce, profession, job or studies. The role of the guru is clearly defined. In the simplest sense, the role of the guru is as a spiritual guide, not a marriage consultant or an academic consultant. Ask the guru how you can attain mental peace, how to develop your positivity and creativity, and you will get the answer. If you can accept the guru as a spiritual guide, you can grow and succeed in life. However, if you think of the guru as your consultant and that by following his advice you will be happy in life, find a good partner, a good profession and make money, then that relationship will not grow at all. You might be happy, fine, but there is no growth and no connection.

Spiritual independence

The association with guru has to be without expectation. There should be no expectation from the guru; rather, there should be an expectation from yourself. What do you expect

from a tubelight, a ten-volt bulb or a hundred watt bulb? To give light. Yet, what do you do when you are able to see? If there is light and you decide to shut your eyes, the light has no meaning. However, if there is darkness and you decide to open your eyes in the dark, you will be able to see one day. Therefore, the expectation should be from yourself, not from the guru.

Just as in the bathroom you see yourself in the mirror, in spiritual life guru is the mirror in which you see your spiritual self reflected. In the bathroom you look in the mirror to groom yourself; in the same manner, when you look at the guru and your reflection, you try to groom yourself to become that beautiful self. The expectation has to be with yourself, not with the guru. Guru is only a mirror that will show you whatever you are at that time. So, how to develop a relationship with guru without becoming dependent on the guru? People become dependent when they begin to expect too much from the other person. However, if you expect improvement from yourself then your dependence will decrease, and that is the secret of spiritual development.

—18 August 2008

What is the integrated approach to yoga practised in this tradition?

The word 'yoga' really does not mean anything. It is like saying the word 'medicine' – it indicates a science, a philosophy, a theory. There are many branches of yoga. Some people excel in hatha yoga practices, some excel in raja yoga practices, and some excel in other forms. There are different groups, organizations and teachers who have picked up one component of yoga and have excelled in it. However, just as a finger is not your body, an eye or an ear is not your body, hatha yoga is not yoga, nor is raja yoga, nor is kundalini yoga. Many parts make up the body. In the same manner, all the different yogas make the subject of

yoga complete. This tradition begins with Swami Sivananda. He used to tell his disciples that in life each individual expresses the qualities of the head, heart and hands – head representing knowledge and the intellect, heart representing feelings and emotions, and hands representing performance, action and participation. In the course of life, the faculties of intellect, emotion and performance are used to develop and grow. Therefore, any practice that is chosen should cater to the individual's needs in relation to these abilities. Swami Sivananda said that when yoga is practised in this manner the benefits are multidimensional. After all, why do people come to yoga? Is emancipation the idea? Self-realization? Is moksha, nirvana, meditation or samadhi the idea? Everyone begins the yogic journey with some goal or idea in mind, and these goals are specific to each branch of yoga.

For example, what is the purpose of raja yoga as expounded by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*? Is attainment of samadhi the purpose of raja yoga? No. The purpose of raja yoga is to control the activity of the mind: *Chitta vritti nirodhah*. Whether you achieve meditation, samadhi or an altered state of mind, consciousness or energy, is dependent on the intensity of your practice and what you wish to derive from the practice. Nevertheless, the focus of raja yoga is not the attainment of samadhi; the focus of raja yoga is mind management. The first three sutras indicate and define the entire process of raja yoga. Patanjali says yoga is a form of discipline, with instructions: *Atha yoganushasanam* (1:1) – ‘Now, therefore, complete instructions regarding yoga’. Patanjali says that with the attainment of this discipline you will be able to manage the modifications of the mind: *Yogaschitta vritti nirodhah* (1:2) – ‘To block the patterns of consciousness is yoga’. Patanjali further says that by managing the modifications of the mind you will become witness to your own actions, life, nature and personality. You will become the observer, the witness and thereby improve your interactions in life: *Tada drashtuh svarupe vasthanam* (1:3) – ‘Then the seer is established (abides) in his own essential nature’. Whether

you attain this balance of mind through pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, asana, pranayama, yama or niyama, depends on the teacher and the receptivity of the student.

Here is a second example: what is the purpose or focus of hatha yoga? Hatha yoga is to acquire mastery over the two forces which govern life, *ida* and *pingala*, the solar and the lunar, the positive and the negative, the pranic-mental and the pranic-physical. This indication is given in the name *hatha* itself: 'ha' is the abbreviation of the mantra *Ham*, which represents the solar pranic force, and 'tha' is the abbreviation of the mantra *Tham*, which represents the mental, subtle, lunar force. Therefore, the objective of 'hatha yoga' is to provide balance in the functions of the pranic and the psychic energy fields. Whether that is achieved by following the different techniques of hatha yoga, including the shatkarmas, is dependent on the teacher and the receptivity and ability of the student.

These are examples to illustrate that each branch of yoga has a specific purpose, and to derive the maximum benefit from the yogas there needs to be a good combination of the yoga practices. Therefore, the Bihar Yoga–Satyananda Yoga tradition speaks of an integrated approach to yoga for the development of all the different levels and dimensions of human nature and personality.

Swami Sivananda instructed Swami Satyananda and his other disciples, such as Swami Satchidananda, Swami Vishnudevananda and Swami Venkateshanananda, to propagate yoga all over the world. One taught raja yoga, one hatha yoga. Some taught bhakti yoga, some taught kundalini yoga, some taught nada yoga. They all picked one branch of yoga and excelled in it. Only Swami Satyananda developed an integral form of yoga, keeping in mind the teachings of Swami Sivananda and the integration of head, heart and hands. Therefore, the yoga that is taught and lived here is not one aspect of yoga; it is a yogic life where every moment of the day can be associated with a concept and a practice of yoga.

Yoga and ashram life

Rule number one of ashram life is: Do not consider yourself to be a student – consider yourself to be a member of the yoga family. If you can adhere to this rule, welcome. If you cannot, if you want to be a student, then outside is better. However, as part of the yoga family, if you allow these different exposures to enrich your own understanding of yoga and spiritual life, you will discover that you will be going from here with bags full of gifts which will last you for all your life.

In the ancient days an ashram used to be called a *gurukul*, living with the family of the guru. An ashram is not an institution. It is not an organization. Of course, there is a structure to facilitate one's needs, but the spirit is that of a gurukul or ashram.

What is the meaning of the word ashram? *Shram* means 'hard work' and *a* means 'come'. 'Come for hard work' is the literal meaning of the word ashram, and if you try to understand it properly, yes, any effort to transform or make changes in life is hard work. It is so difficult to change a small habit, so imagine the effort that one has to put in to bring about a balanced and creative transformation in one's own life. It is difficult to manage one's own thoughts, responses, elations and frustrations, so it is hard work to bring about a qualitative transformation in one's life. Therefore, the name 'ashram' is appropriate – a place where you work hard to bring a qualitative change in your own life.

In the ashram, the routine is geared to create an environment that is conducive to studies, practices and growth. Many people over the past years have asked me, "Is it possible to have yoga training without living in the ashram, just coming for classes?" To all of them I have said, "No." Yoga is not something that you study for one hour in a classroom environment, and then go out into normal life and call yourself a yogi. In every country, there are centres where you can go for an hourly education in yoga and go back to your normal life. Even in Rishikesh, there

are ashrams that allow that facility. However, to live yoga, to understand and imbibe yoga, you have to create a change in the normal pattern of life. If you want to swim, you have to jump in the water and swim. In the same manner, if you want to learn yoga you have to jump into the yogic environment completely, totally. This is one thing that many people find difficult initially, as they are not used to certain systems, disciplines and regulations, yet you will find that as you follow them you will become much more relaxed and free internally.

If everything is dependent on likes and dislikes in the world, there is no hope for humankind. Sometimes the doctor has to give sour medicine also. Not every medicine is tasty and sweet. There is a prayer: God, give me the things that I need, not those that I want. We can want anything under the sun, but do we require it?

If you have eyesight, you can see the whole of creation, not only the sun. If you want to see the sun, remember: it is not your need. It can be a desire, aspiration or ambition that can easily be fulfilled if only you can see. However, once you gain your sight, it is not only the sun that you see, but the entire universe. That is the aim of yoga, developing the sight. That is the actual effort of yoga, not emancipation, not nirvana, not moksha. Many people say, "I am disturbed. I want to find peace." Yet, how can you find peace if you don't know what has caused distress in life? Therefore, awareness has to be cultivated, and as awareness is cultivated, one's involvement, participation and understanding in life changes.

Yoga is something which is experienced in the course of life. It enables one to become proficient and excellent in everything that is done. Yoga allows one to access the better side of life with greater ease, whether it is through increased optimism, hope, positivity, and creativity, or improving one's own understanding, thoughts, communication, personality and nature. This allows one to face different situations in life in a better manner. Yoga is a process by which one can

acquire excellence. With meditation, with work, with love and even with hate, excellence is the drive: so every experience is taken to its final culmination. Yoga gives that ability. With this ability, whatever you do in life, you will always be able to find a balance between your external involvement and internal aspiration.

—24 September 2008

How does yoga relate to spiritual life and God?

Let us start with the individual who is born on this planet to specific parents and born in a specific culture, society and community. All these influences shape the mind, feelings, logic, behaviour, ethics, morality, and so on. In the course of life one tries to fulfil one's aspirations, desires and expectations – sometimes struggling and sometimes smoothly. Throughout the course of life one develops and gets caught up in different associations, friendships and families, and at the end, when the time comes, one departs. People are born, educated, have their profession, have their family, have their pension and then die. That is the general trend of life the world over.

Continual evolution

In this general trend of living, there is one understanding that allows human beings to develop their skills and their inherent qualities: that we are all evolving. If that awareness and understanding is there, that we are evolving and there is a continuation even beyond death, then naturally the desire comes to know what evolution is and how we can become better. It is this quest to improve one's self that is the main drive of a human being, and in this quest we create and formulate our own concepts, ideas and beliefs that guide, inspire and motivate us to look into other areas of our lives and explore expressions of the mind and consciousness that have not yet been accessed. The shift from normal involvement in life to the cultivation of awareness, along with

the endeavour to access those areas of life that are presently untapped, marks the beginning of spiritual life.

Spiritual life is different to religious life; do not confuse the two. They are poles apart. They are the two ends of the stick. Spiritual life indicates a transformation taking place in the life of an individual where one comes closer to the inner nature, where one tries to discover one's own transcendental nature and to cultivate positive, creative qualities and virtues. Spiritual life is an expression of an integrated personality, an integration between head, heart and hands. It is not important in spiritual life whether you believe in God or not. You can be a believer or non-believer; as what you believe or do not believe is your own expression of mind. Spiritual life is not bound by devotion; rather it is about coming into contact with your own inner nature, the inner spirit, and cultivating positive, creative and harmonious qualities. God is something different.

Transcendental awareness

Yoga speaks of spiritual life and Buddha spoke of spiritual life. However, whenever people used to ask Buddha questions about God he would keep silent. Even yoga keeps silent about God. The only reference to God that comes in the *Yoga Sutras* is when Sage Patanjali says that God is a reality that is beyond suffering, pain, happiness, pleasure and karmic influence. To be beyond pain and pleasure, and to be beyond karmic influence or karmic bondage, is the state of transcendental awareness. However, in our life we are not transcendental. Somebody once asked my guru Swami Satyananda if it is possible to be realized in one lifetime. He answered, "No." So the person asked him, "But everyone says that self-realization is the goal. Every philosophy, every practice, even yoga speaks of attaining self-realization; are they all false?" He said, "No. The intention is correct, the process is correct, but the expectation of attaining realization in one lifetime is not correct. The aim of every sadhana and every practice should be to change the quality of mind. Self-realization

is not possible now as the basic quality of the mind has to change; the limitations have to be removed. The purpose of sadhana and effort is to overcome the limitations of the mind and personality. Once you have overcome these limitations self-realization is not a distant reality, it becomes accessible.

Practice not preaching

One has to begin working with the body, as the body is the container of all experiences. The senses, the brain, all the organs are in the body, energies exist in the body, and they have to be harmonized. They all need to help each other grow. The senses have to help the brain, the brain has to help the mind, the mind has to help the thoughts. There has to be a mutual support system created within our nature. Every yoga has an aim. If you look at all the yogas you will find that prominence is given to the management of mind, or the management of energy, or the management of the subtle expressions and behaviours of our nature.

Yoga helps in the cultivation and development of one's spiritual life and this spiritual life does not contradict any beliefs. If there was any contradiction between spiritual life and the various belief systems that exist around the world, many things about yoga would not be accepted by people in society. Yoga has been accepted and promoted in the West. Yoga has been accepted and is being taught in the Middle East; the Bihar School of Yoga is the only organization in the world that has the sanction to print and publish books and distribute them freely in the Arabic language in Iraq and other countries. For them, it is clear that classical yoga encourages the development of spiritual life and is not enforcing a belief system. How can a belief system be enforced in yoga when yoga itself says, 'God is a reality free from pleasure and pain and karmic bondage'?

Awakenings

As you beautify your own life, as you gain more control over the expressions of consciousness and energy, the

mind changes. It goes through various transformations, and these transformations of mind in yoga are known as awakenings – awakening of a brain centre, of a mental centre of experience, of a psychic centre of experience. Everyone goes through these awakenings throughout the course of their natural life. When you are born you are totally ignorant and later on, through the process of education, you come to a state of mental maturity. You begin to understand things, to read and write, and communicate. Appropriate behaviour comes through right education and inappropriate behaviour comes from a lack of education. Appropriate behaviour is maturity of the mind, and in this maturity of mind there comes a point when you realize that the so-called divine or transcendental spark is within us. That is the state of yogic realization. That is point one.

Sat, chit, ananda

Point two, whether we are inside God or outside God is irrelevant. We are an expression of godly desire. Just as your children are an expression of your physical, emotional and sensual desires, in the same manner, life is an expression of godly desire. Without that godly desire we would not be here. This is such a big creation, such a big universe functioning in an orderly way, that there must be some force that creates balance. There must be some force that creates balance in life, too, and that gives strength, encouragement and peace whenever we connect with it. Whenever we are in distress, we look to that nature for help and guidance. Even an atheist, who does not believe in God, will try to discover peace and contentment in times of distress. God is the name of a state with which we identify in order to experience peace, tranquillity, beauty and expansiveness.

The Indian tradition, not yoga, says there are three aspects of God: *sat* or truth, *chit* or consciousness, and *ananda* or bliss. Truth, expansive consciousness and bliss are the three qualities of the transcendental nature. These same three qualities are also known as *satyam* or truth, *shivam* or

the auspicious consciousness, and *sundaram* or the grace, the beauty and the bliss. The Indian tradition says to realize these three qualities of God. If you pick up any limb, you find that limb is connected to the body. If you pick up truth, you will discover God in truth. If you pick up grace, beauty and bliss, you will discover God in that. If you pick up chit or shivam, the auspicious quality, you will discover God in that. Therefore, grab hold of any of these three qualities.

At night when there is no light and nothing can be seen, what will babies or young children do? They will grope around until they grab their mother or father's hand, finger or leg, and then they feel safe. Although they are only holding one little finger, they know they are holding onto their parent. You do not have to see your parents to be safe and secure, you just have to hold onto one part. In the same way, when you grab 'sat', 'chit or 'ananda', there will be safety and security in that.

Dissolve the ego

Now point three. Spiritual awakening leads to eradication of the ego. If there is ego then there cannot be spiritual attainment. You can dupe yourself by thinking, 'I have attained it', but that is actually enforcing your own ego, and as your ego is more and more enforced you distance yourself from spiritual realization. Whoever says, "I have attained realization", is feeding his own ego. Throughout the world, any master who claims to have seen God or to have become realized is reinforcing his own ego. That awareness, identification and realization cannot come as long as the ego principle is there. Ego represents individuality and realization represents connectivity, connection between the individual and God, between the individual and other people.

There is a short story related to connectivity. One swami came to India and met his guru and said, "Look, I'm interested in spiritual life and I want to attain self-realization in this life itself!" His guru said, 'Well start walking. Whether

you reach your destination in this life or ten lives down the line doesn't matter, keep on walking." The swami replied, "But I want some tool, some help to hasten my journey." His guru said, "Just follow the normal course of your practices in your life, and if it is meant to happen one day you will reach it." The swami was a brash young man at that time, and he put his foot down. He said, "No. I want you to give me some mantra by which I can be instantly realized." This was a big problem, as never before in history has anybody been given a mantra for instant realization. Nevertheless, he bugged his guru so much that his guru said, 'All right. Go to your room, sit down and repeat this specific mantra that will identify you with the highest consciousness. Don't come out of the room until you have realized the supreme.'

The young swami went to his room with the new mantra, sat down and started his meditation. He went so deep that he forgot his hunger, he forgot about going to the toilet, he forgot about brushing his teeth, bathing or cleaning. He simply dwelled in samadhi. His face began to glow. After a week, he came out of the room and proclaimed, "Guru is great. I have realized the divine." He said to the other disciples, "I want to see Guruji. I have achieved something that no other disciple of his has achieved – realization." The other disciples were a bit jealous; even so they took him to their guru. The intoxicated swami said to the guru, "The mantra you gave me was so powerful that after three days I began to see the divine glow in everything. The birds are singing the message of God, the trees are shining with the presence of God. If I look at a stone or a rock, all I see is the smiling face of God. I look at people, and in their smile I see the smile of God." He went on and on. His guru then said, "All right. Do one thing. You have had your attainment. Do not dwell too much upon it. Be practical and go to the market to buy some vegetables for our dinner this evening."

With this instruction, the young swami took the shopping bag and money and went out of the ashram gates. While he was walking, he was totally transported – the flea-ridden dog

was God, the beggar was God, the fly was God, the mosquito was God, the birds were God, the trees were God, the leaves were God, everywhere was God, up was God, down was God, right was God, left was God, below was God, in front was God, behind was God. He was totally ecstatic on the way to the market. Then, when he reached the market, he saw everybody rushing away. He stopped someone and asked, "What happened? Why is everybody running?" The person answered, "One mad elephant is in the market destroying everything in its path, killing people, trampling them. The market is closed, everybody is running away, you should also run back to the ashram."

The newly realized sage began to think, 'If everything is God, then that mad elephant must also be God. If I confront the mad elephant maybe through my power I can convince him and show him that I am God and he is God, and what harm can one God do to another God? No problem.' He forgot one thing: the mad elephant had not taken mantra initiation and had no guru.

The swami went and stood in front of the elephant, and was picked up by the trunk of the elephant and thrown on the ground. A totally destroyed, shattered, broken young swami returned to the ashram about six hours later, all in plaster. It was evening time, and guruji was walking around and came across the young swami. He asked, "What happened to you?" The swami looked at him and exploded, "What is all this nonsense about God and mantra? It's all false." His guru said, "What happened, tell me the story. How come you are in plaster?" So, the swami told him the full story. At the end his guru said, "Yes, but you missed one thing. The person who came to warn you was also God, and you should have heeded that warning."

This story suggests that a person who has attained realization is not influenced by ego plays, like the young swami was; rather such a person is connected to everyone. If the connection was there, the swami would have heeded the message of the person telling him to run away. If 'realization'

gives birth to ego and arrogance, where 'I' and the thought that 'I am the chosen one' becomes predominant, there is something wrong. I am the chosen one? Chosen is fine, but when you say 'I am', what does that mean? Ego. It is me, not you. Christ had self-realization, yet look at the humility in his life. Many other people in history also have had realizations, yet look at the humility, the compassion, love and connection in their life. This is merging with God.

There is another story. One day a doll made out of salt decided to check the depth of the ocean. She dove in, and where she disappeared to, nobody knows. The same principle applies to merging with God. There is dissolution of the 'I'-identity and oneness established with the universal realm. That is the concept of realization, and it is not different to the unified field theory of science.

Experience other levels

If a mosquito bites you on your toe, where do you feel the pain? You identify the toe as the location; however, the pain is not felt there. The pain is felt in the brain. If somebody pinches you, where do you feel the pinch? Although the skin is being twisted, the pain is experienced by the brain. On a hot day, you put your hand in some cool water. Which part of the body feels the coolness? Although the hand is in the water, it is the brain that feels the coolness. No matter what happens to you in the body, another level is recognizing that event. In the same manner, no matter what you do with your life in terms of spiritual or material sadhana, the effect of it is felt in the spirit. Just as the mind becomes disturbed, the spirit also becomes disturbed. Just as the body becomes disturbed, the spirit also becomes disturbed. This is the unified field theory. You cannot see the mind, yet you know the mind is present; you recognize your mind through your thoughts, feelings, sentiments, emotions, ideas, intellect, and so on. You have never seen the spirit, yet you know it is there, due to the certain experiences that affect you from time to time.

The purity of your life indicates whether you are coming closer to the transcendental nature. It is attaining purity that you should be concerned with, through yoga and other methods. After having attained purity you discover that you were never separate from the transcendental reality. A fish in the water asks “What is water?” without realizing that it is surrounded by water. In the same manner, human beings ask “What is God?” without realizing that they are surrounded by God.

Swamiji, could you explain the concept of non-violence, *ahimsa*, its scope and limitations, for example, with regard to insects, killing and eating farmed animals, and maintaining the balance of the population of animals?

Himsa is generally translated as aggression or violence. *Ahimsa* means the absence of aggression and the absence of violence. The human mind is subject to three states of experience: *sattwic*, the positive, clear and pure; *rajasic*, the aggressive, dynamic and assertive; and *tamasic*, the negative, destructive and limiting. Negative behaviours of the mind manifest when *tamas* is predominant. *Himsa* or violence will manifest when *tamas* is predominant, and *ahimsa* or non-violence means the eradication of the *tamasic* and establishment of the pure, the *sattwic*.

In the yogic perspective there are *yamas* and *niyamas*. There are five *yamas* or conditions which we try to create in our life. They have to be developed because the natural tendency of the mind is *tamasic*. What are the five *yamas*? They are mentioned in the *Yoga Sutras*. The first is *satya*, truthfulness. People are not truthful. What is truth for you? Is it something that you live every day? It is not a philosophical idea. People are not truthful in their life at all. People put on masks; they hide behind identities. People do not allow themselves to be natural. They hide from their weaknesses and debilities; and in order to forget their weaknesses and debilities, they assert themselves and become aggressive. They do not accept themselves as they are. This is the state

of *asatya*, falseness. Hiding behind the skirt of self-imposed ideas is following *asatya*. Therefore, the remedy is to adhere to *satya*, to observe when you are behaving or thinking with falsity, and when you can be natural and truthful.

It is the same with *ahimsa*, the second *yama*. What are those things that cause suffering and distress, and how can we stop them? If you are angry about something and you decide to sit down quietly and seethe in isolation, believing that by not hitting anyone you are following *ahimsa*, you are wrong. The absence of an aggressive and violent nature within you is the state of *ahimsa*. Knowing what is needed and appropriate, and not accumulating things is *aparigraha*, the third *yama*. Knowing how to live life independently without any support, without the need to beg, borrow and steal is *asteya*, the fourth *yama*. To be conscious of the divine presence is *brahmacharya*, the fifth *yama*. These are the five traits which yoga says one should cultivate in order to overcome the negative traits of the mind.

There are some people who have taken *ahimsa* to the extreme; they go with a broom in their hand sweeping the ground as they walk, so that they do not step on any insect. That is their vocation in life; however, it does not mean that it is *ahimsa*. There are people who say that one should not take a life and that killing is *himsa*; however, this is not so from the vedic, yogic or Indian perspective. These are different principles and ideas that people can adopt in the course of their life to suit their own belief system. However, *ahimsa* simply means the absence of a violent and aggressive nature within you so that you are at peace with yourself. Whether you kill an insect or not, whether you kill a goat or not, that is your choice according to your present understanding and need. However, if you try to live in the right manner, then eventually you move away from these kinds of violent acts.

—27 September 2008

I thought yoga and ayurveda were very closely linked, like two wings of a bird. Why isn't there any introduction on ayurveda here? Could you describe please the relationship between ayurveda and yoga?

Ayur means 'longevity'; *veda* means 'knowledge'. Therefore, *ayurveda* means 'the science of longevity', the knowledge by which one can increase the span of life. Ayurveda has many different parts to it: one is lifestyle, another is diet and a third is medication. In the medical side of ayurveda, herbal medicines are used to treat illnesses. In the dietary side of ayurveda, food is used to promote health. In the lifestyle aspect of ayurveda, certain routines have to be followed for eating, drinking, sleeping, waking up, and so on. There are also other sub-branches of ayurveda.

Which ayurveda should we practise in the ashram? Medical ayurveda? We do not have that knowledge or training, and real ayurvedic practitioners are now becoming fewer and fewer as commercial ayurveda is gaining force. One of the topmost acharyas of ayurveda in India lived in Munger. He died about ten years ago, but he was the best. He was so good that he only had to look at a person to diagnose the problem; and he would not look at more than four patients a day. After seeing them, he would wander around gathering his own herbs to prepare the medicine. He would give the medicine to those patients and then see the next group. His therapy used to work miracles, however; the therapeutic medicinal ayurveda is now becoming a lost science. There are many ayurvedic colleges and universities; however, they follow the modern trend rather than the classical.

Ayurveda has different rules for every location regarding diet: for those living in plains, for those living in mountains, for those living near the river, for those living near the sea. However, according to the theory of ayurveda, there is only one sentence that describes what the diet should be: the diet has to be sattwic, which means it should not include too many spices, condiments or oils. It is bland food. In ayurveda, the diet is divided into three groups:

sattwic, rajasic and tamasic. A tamasic diet brings lethargy, makes the body heavy, and makes the brain and mind sluggish. A rajasic diet stimulates the body, whereas a sattwic diet nourishes the body. For a sattwic diet only seasonal vegetables are eaten. Nothing out of season should be eaten; however, now with all the cold storage, winter vegetables are eaten in summer and summer vegetables in winter. People eat for taste, for their pleasure and enjoyment, and the seasonal concept has been lost.

Furthermore, food should be eaten when the pranic systems of the body become active. The electro-magnetic systems of the body become sluggish after sundown, and therefore, ayurveda states that dinner should be at 5 pm, before sunset, not at eight o'clock at night. Once the sun sets, nothing should be consumed. Parties are not allowed in ayurveda. Breakfast should be eaten after sunrise and dinner before sunset. Like this there are certain rules of ayurveda that are applicable to ashram life and these are followed, especially in terms of sattwic food and eating at appropriate times.

As far as the relationship of ayurveda with yoga is concerned, if you live right, you live a long, healthy and peaceful life. Therefore, along with yoga practices, seasonal routines of diet and appropriate times of eating make a powerful combination so that one can live a healthy life. Therefore, both the system of yoga and ashram life incorporate many components and disciplines of ayurveda.

What is the yogic approach to anger management?

From the perspective of psychologists, psychiatrists and psychoanalysts, I can understand the logic when they recommend 'letting off steam'. When you are cooking with a pressure cooker, the pressure of steam builds up and once the meal is cooked, a valve is used to release the steam before the lid is opened. In the same way, people believe that if there is a lot of build-up inside, one has to allow it to come out, and by allowing it to come out you release your anger. That is one way of looking at it and it does help some people, however,

it is not the final answer. Why is it not the final answer? Because you are still subject to the grip of anger.

What is the yogic solution for anger management? Two things have helped me. The first one is an asana, *shashankasana*, the half moon pose. Shashankasana has a direct influence on the adrenals. When one is angry, the adrenals become very active and a lot of adrenaline flows into the system. By practising *shashankasana*, one can control the secretion of adrenaline and gradually reduce it so that in the course of two or three months there is a drastic reduction of anger.

Reflection

The second means of anger management is reflection. Becoming angry is no problem; however, you should reflect on it when you are quiet. If you were to encounter the same situation again, how would you respond in a better way – not aggressively? You will discover that in six-months time, before you even become angry, subconsciously you will be looking for alternate responses. These two things have helped me: *shashankasana* and trying to find a better way, a more positive, creative and constructive way to deal with situations, rather than in an aggressive, reactive way.

This is a part of mental training. How many of you have trained your mind? Instead of you training the mind, the mind has trained you to follow its whims. You have not trained the mind to be objective, to be clear, to use its wisdom and understanding; this is clear when you see yourself reacting to something. Why did the reaction occur and why was there guilt afterwards? When you feel guilty, it means that you are feeling sorry for having taken the action, and that means there was a possibility to manage the situation in a different way, which at the time you did not. The process of training the mind is to go through a situation, let off steam, and then reflect, asking yourself, “If this situation happens again, how can I deal with it in a positive, creative and constructive way?”

















One has to know human psychology; human beings tend to behave in a different way to animals. For example, when a puppy urinates somewhere where it should not, you make the dog smell it immediately and say 'No!' so that it registers that it should not urinate there. In this way, whenever an animal makes a mistake you have to immediately point it out for it to register that it has made a mistake. This applies to all domesticated animals. However, for human beings, if you point out their mistake instantly, there is going to be a bigger explosion, a bigger reaction. So when do you tell a person that he or she is wrong? And how to deal with your own mistakes and train yourself? That is why you need to study human psychology. It is a fact that human beings should never be told their mistakes in the heat of the moment. You have to wait for the right time, when their mind will not react, and it is the same with yourself. Eventually you will find that the aggressive response will not be there anymore. This is the way to manage anger.

How can we know whether the world would best be served by our living an ashram life or continuing to evolve through living a normal life in the world, doing our best to share knowledge and uplift others?

No place is better or less good. It depends on the mentality and inclinations of the individual. I prefer the ashram as this is my life. You may prefer your city apartment or home and family, as that is your life. There are attachments here and you have your attachments there. If you are only planning to learn something here and then use that little something outside that is perfectly okay. However, if you want to focus on one thing in order to develop an experience in your life, you need to immerse yourself for some time in the presence of the master or guru. Outside the ashram a guru is not available on a daily basis to guide the journey. An ashram is not a place where one lives one's whole life. The maximum number of years permitted in the tradition is twelve. After twelve years, you are thrown out of the guru's ashram. You

have to leave, and then you are free to do whatever you want to do: have a centre, become a teacher in your own right, or have a family and help society in your own way. The important thing is training.

Even in this ashram, all the people who are in geru are not permanent residents. They come and live here for a certain time. Some live here for a few years, some live here for ten or twelve years, and then there are a few who pledge their whole life. I am a person who has pledged my life; however, I do not expect that from every other geru-wearer in this ashram. There are certain people who pledge their life and work to further the mission of the ashram and the tradition. In this ashram, there are only five or six who are 'lifers'. Others come and spend three, five, six, seven or ten years and then they go.

The ashram is a place where people come for training. You do not live your life in a hospital in order to remain healthy. You go there for treatment and then return to live a healthy life at home. It is the same thing here. People are here for any number of years, and then they have to discover and establish their spirituality outside this environment. There are some people who make themselves part of the ashram, continuing to develop and expand the vision of the mission and there are people who receive the training and go out to live, work, teach and support society. Therefore, if you have the capacity to contribute to the development of society, this can be done wherever and however you are comfortable.

How should one look after the next generation?

In our Munger and Rikhia ashrams, there is a big group of children who are involved. In Munger, there is a team of over 40,000 who are yoga children. They come here regularly in groups to learn yoga and chanting, and to gain inspiration in different areas. They are taught karate, music, painting, English, yoga, and so on. Along with that, 5,000 of these children are yoga teachers in Munger, and they are better yoga teachers than grown-ups. The children are sent out to

different cities to conduct yoga classes and they are all below the age of fourteen. They are admitted into the Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, the Children's Yoga Fellowship, from the age of seven to the age of fourteen. The entire management of the Fellowship is theirs – they are the president, the secretary and the treasurer. They organize everything and they conduct everything.

Throughout India there are over 200,000 children who are one hundred percent yoga children. They come here during vacations, weekends and during their summer holidays. Munger hosts the biggest children's yoga festival where six to seven thousand children gather every year. Throughout the year they conduct programs and activities, not only in town but wherever they are invited. The yoga children come from far away. At five o'clock in the morning they can be seen in their red tracksuits cycling to the ashram from twenty kilometres away. They also do a lot of social work. Many times when there are emergencies in town these children come together and clear up everything. The President of India, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, has come twice to Munger, to Ganga Darshan, to see these children and he said that he has never seen anywhere in India such a versatile group of children. Their communication is so good that if one child is told that tomorrow at three o'clock something is going to be done, within three hours' time the message will have gone to each and every one of the 40,000 children in the area. The organization in Munger is superb.

Similarly, there is another organization in Rikhia. There, from about ten villages, the ashram has adopted one child from every house and about fourteen to fifteen hundred children come and spend the entire day in the ashram. Those children belong to a different background; they are tribal children whose parents have nothing. They earn five rupees by collecting twigs from the forest and selling them in the market. They are the children of have-nots, who have never seen a piece of chocolate. In the form of a sweet, they have previously only tasted sugar. Such children have been

adopted there. Ten years down the line you will see them managing their own households and affairs.

The 40,000 children who are being trained may become administrators, businessmen, engineers, doctors or even the President or Prime Minister of the country, who knows? When they go to their post or profession, they will take with them this yogic education, and they will also share it with their children when they are married. Therefore, this is an important undertaking. We are seeing the result of yoga in the lives of children. The Children's Yoga Fellowship was created in Munger in 1995. Now it is 2008, and in every school there are a large number of children who are yoga practioners and yoga teachers, and who teach other children in their own school. If the next generation is looked after, you can sleep well. If you do not look after the next generation and only think about yourselves you will have sleepless nights.

—29 September 2008

If Navaratri is a time for purification and recharging the spiritual battery, how do you know that a certain samskara has been cleaned or cleared? What is the process like and how does it feel?

You do not feel anything and you do not know anything, that is the reality. How does one know which samskara has been cleaned when we do not even know what samskaras are within us? When you throw a bucket of water down a drain blocked by rubbish, sixty or seventy percent of the rubbish gets cleaned by the flow of the water. You do not have to keep on checking every inch to see what has been cleaned and what has not been cleaned.

To begin with, people do not have that awareness. They do not know what their samskaras are, what their attachments, hang-ups and head-trips are. Also, they change every day, so how does one decide: this is my samskara, this is my karma, this is my insecurity or hang-up, this is my

happiness? It is impossible. Due to the sheer impossibility of knowing all this, human beings have classified all experiences in two categories: good and bad. You know what is good inside you and you know what is bad inside you. If there is a reduction of the bad and an increase of the good, you know you are on the right path. If there is reduction of the good and an increase of the bad, you have to review the process you are undergoing which has produced that change.

The most basic thing to know is that the power of *sattwa*, of good, is starting to become brighter and brighter, and the negative, *tamasic* power, is becoming less and less. This does not happen in one week; however, during Navaratri the process will start and you will have some glimpses into what has transpired and what has happened within yourself.

What is the historical origin of yoga?

The tradition says that it is ancient. In South America, the practices and spiritual theories of some of the ancient tribes who lived there, and who continue to live there, have a strong yoga background. Many of the statues found at the sites of their ancient monuments, and in the museums, are in classical yogic postures such as *padmasana*, the lotus posture, *vrikshasana*, the scorpion pose, *sarvangasana*, shoulder stand, *vajrasana*, the thunderbolt pose, and even the peacock pose, *mayurasana*. There are also statues illustrating the *bandhas*, the different 'locks' of the body.

At one place in Colombia, in San Augustine, there is an open-air museum spanning many acres of land with life-size statues of warriors and normal people; on the backs of the statues symbols of the chakras and kundalini are carved. From carbon dating, these different statues are said to originate in five or six thousand BCE.

Similar findings were made by one of our Scandinavian sannyasins, Swami Janakananda; the theories, practices and symbologies of yoga are to be found in the old traditions of the Scandinavian countries. Similar discoveries have also been made on the African continent. This has given birth to

the idea that once upon a time yoga was a global culture, and due to the ravages of time such as political changes, natural calamities, migration of tribes, invasions and so on, lots of death and destruction took place that suppressed the yogic culture in countries.

In Asia the yogic culture survived; however, this region also went through a lot of political and ideological changes. During this period many of the remaining yogic enclaves were destroyed, such as in Afghanistan, which used to be a powerful centre for spiritual life, for Buddhism and the mystical sciences and arts, just as Tibet is today. However, everything has been destroyed and those who still know their heritage are not free to speak about it due to present restrictions on culture, tradition, religion and beliefs. Therefore even in Asia, different spiritual enclaves have been destroyed and neglected.

Renaissance of yoga

The same thing happened in India. Generally, people today have no idea of what yoga was or is. Nevertheless, through divine grace, renunciates and recluses living in isolation continued to maintain the tradition. After a gap of nearly two thousand years, yoga was again revived by the sannyasins in the 1950s. Prior to that people only knew of yoga as part of eastern mysticism or had some vision of fakirs lying on a bed of nails, or living naked in isolation high up in the mountains surrounded by snow and ice. That was the concept and image people had of yoga: something mystical, something eastern, something possibly pagan and not for them.

The sannyasins revived yoga, and the first person was Swami Vivekananda when he went to Chicago in 1887. However, he only spoke on the theory and did not give any practices. Then after him Paramahansa Yogananda and Swami Sivananda became the inspirers of the yogic renaissance in the world. Gradually, since the 1950s, yoga has become more accepted and popular, not as a mystical tradition but as a way of life. That is in brief the history of yoga.

In India, yoga is divided into two groups: the yoga of North India and the yoga of South India. The two major yogas of South India are hatha yoga and kriya yoga. The *acharyas*, or masters, of that tradition propagate hatha yoga even today; however, the kriya yoga tradition has been lost in the South. The Krishnacharya tradition, Desikar Acharya and B.K.S. Iyengar are the followers of hatha yoga and belong to the southern lineage of yoga. In the North it seems that people had more time to reflect and develop different systems of yoga, not only as a practice but as a way to incorporate yoga in normal life. They developed raja yoga, bhakti yoga, karma yoga, jnana yoga and kundalini yoga, and they incorporated kriya yoga and hatha yoga from the South.

The ancient spiritual quest

How old yoga is in India cannot be said. Carbon dating of statues indicates four to five thousand BC, which is about six or seven thousand years ago; however, yoga would be even older than that, as it takes many hundreds of years and many generations for a philosophy or subject to develop. When the concept of kundalini and the chakras was seen reflected in the same manner in South America, in the Scandinavian countries and in Africa, it led to the belief that those people were presenting yoga to the people in statues and had refined yoga to a high level, possibly to the same level that is being practised today, which involves kundalini, chakras, mantras and symbols. How could that uniformity and level of excellence in theory and in practice have been maintained? It must have taken thousands of years for yoga to evolve to that point of perfection.

Is yoga a practice only? No. The search to know one's self and one's role started when primitive man first became aware of himself and started questioning, 'What is that shining up above, the golden orb, the white disk, the twinkling lights? How should I live, how do I survive?' These questions further inspired the individual to ask:

‘Who am I? Where am I?’ From that moment the quest of spiritual life began. That is the common ground. After all, children lie on the ground and look up at the sky and think, ‘How are those twinkling stars hanging up there?’ and based on the information that is available today we have an answer. However, in the absence of information, people had to rely on their own wisdom, understanding and experience. Therefore, ‘Who am I?’ and ‘Where am I?’ were the first questions, and later on these questions led to the development of various philosophies, systems and beliefs that are still ingrained in our genes today.

Do the prevailing ideas about tantra in the West differ from the philosophy and practice of tantra in the Indian tradition?

Definitely. The prevailing idea in the West about tantra is related to mooladhara chakra and nothing beyond it. An interesting thing is that most of the books on tantra that are on the market in the West are written by western intellectuals. Their approach is absolutely different. The western writers have taken tantra to be purely a physical, sexual process. In India the belief is that our whole life is tantra – from the moment we are born until the moment we die, all the stages that we go through in between birth and death, is tantra.

The word tantra is made up of two different words: ‘tan’ is the abbreviation of *tanoti*, which means expansion of consciousness, and ‘tra’ is the abbreviation of *trayati*, which means liberation of energy. Therefore, *tantra* means expansion of consciousness and liberation of energy at all levels: physical, psychological, psychic, spiritual and cosmic. That is, the total development of all the faculties of consciousness. The final expression of the energy, the universal and the inner, is the concept of tantra.

In remote antiquity, the seat and source of tantra was Bengal. There they developed different forms of tantric practices: *Surya tantra*, the tantra of the sun; *Ganapatya*

tantra, the tantra of Ganesha; *Vaishnava tantra*, the tantra of Narayana; *Shaiva tantra*, the tantra of Shiva, and *Shakta tantra*, the tantra of Shakti. By identifying with a particular quality or nature and by trying to stimulate that quality within oneself, one could live one of these five tantras. These tantric practices were more contemplative and meditative in nature.

Overcoming the instincts

Tantra believes that there are three natures in every individual – the animal nature, *pashubhava*; the warrior nature, *veerbhava*; and the divine nature, *divyabhava*. From the animal nature to the warrior nature to the divine nature was the movement and the progression of tantra. Pashubhava is within us in the sense that we are all subject to our instincts – and what are those instincts? Craving, sleep, insecurity or fear, and sexuality are the four basic instincts in every individual. In each person one instinct is more powerful. In some people it is their sexual drive. In others insecurity and fear is powerful and this is reflected in their nature, behaviour, thoughts, everything. In some people craving is powerful and in some people sleep is powerful. If you analyze and review your life, you will discover which one is your most powerful instinct.

As a child, I had no problem with other things, but sleep was a big problem. I used to sleep so soundly that four sannyasins could carry my bed and put it outside the gate, and I would not even know it. So then I had to learn how to manage it. Similarly, everybody will discover that they have one predominant instinct that is more forceful and dominating. There are some people who are always eating something. For them craving, or their *ahara* instinct, is predominant. There are other people who are fearful, insecure, under-confident, with low self-esteem and always unsure whether they can do something or not. They often fail simply because they come to the conclusion that they are not able to fulfil what they have started. For them other

things are not a problem yet insecurity and fear of not succeeding is very strong.

Appropriate sadhanas

These instincts were observed by the tantrics as barriers in the development of consciousness and so they brought in practices to help manage these four basic instincts. There are specific sadhanas for each instinct. Some famous novels such as *The Left Hand of God – Aghora* or *The Third Eye*, although works of fiction, give an indication of the processes that people with different natures and mentalities have to go through. Some are extreme, such as meditating in a graveyard in the middle of the night. It is not necessary or advisable for people to follow such extreme measures today. Nevertheless, such practices were defined and described in order to overcome the different levels of instincts.

Sexuality was not rejected; however, it was confined to the spouse only. This became the Kaula tantra. Tantra never gave sanction for illicit relationships. Today people are using the ‘tantric’ label as their green card for having relationships, however, the classical tantric relationship takes place between husband and wife, just as it does today. In addition to this, the tantrics gave another dimension to the sexual relationship by saying that there are three reasons for the sexual act: the first is pleasure, the second is progeny, and the third is sublimation. Householders who only follow the path of pleasure and progeny need to incorporate sublimation in their sexual act. This aspect came in as a sadhana between the husband and wife in order to overcome and transcend negative sexuality – that is, the bee going to every flower to suck the pollen. Positive sexuality is where two people help each other to free their energies and enter a meditative contemplative state and experience the awakening of the chakras. This is only a minor part of tantra, yet it is this part that has been exploited by western writers as something that will give them greater happiness, pleasure and unity. Unfortunately, it does not work that way.

Understand the code

There are also many people who believe that tantra sanctions total indulgence, that tantrics can drink wine, eat fish and meat, have illicit relationships and do everything they want. However, in the scriptures it has been stated clearly that if through sex or *maithuna* it is possible to be enlightened, then everybody in this world would be enlightened except the renunciates. If by eating meat it is possible to be enlightened, then people who are vegetarians are in deep trouble. If by drinking wine it is possible to be enlightened then it is good business for the wine companies. If by eating fish it is possible to be enlightened then let us all eat fish. Why do yoga and meditation?

The *Kulanava Tantra*, one of the most important texts on tantra, has clearly stated that these are symbolic descriptions of a process that takes place inside you. About eating fish it says: “You can only eat two fish, not more than that.” What are the two fish? The respiration: inhalation and exhalation. Control that, master that and then you will become the fish-eating tantric. Maithuna, sexuality – what is that about? Is it a relationship between two people? No. it is the ascent of kundalini and the union of kundalini shakti with Shiva at sahasrara. It is that ascent of kundalini and that union which is defined in tantra as *maithuna*. Therefore, if you are practising kundalini yoga, kundalini tantra, you are practising maithuna.

What is the meaning of drinking wine? There is one centre in the body called *lalana chakra* in the upper palate at the back of the throat. The yogic tradition says that *amrit*, the nectar of immortality, in the form of a hormone drips from that gland. When that ambrosia is consumed by the fires of the *manipura chakra*, one is subject to birth and death. However, that yogi who can practise *khechari mudra* stops the ambrosia from flowing down to *manipura* and attains immortality. This is stated even in *hatha yoga* literatures such as *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*. Therefore, it is the perfection of mudras and stimulation of *amrit* that is ‘drinking wine’.

In this manner, the tantrics have used different symbol-ogies to indicate a process, a practice or a technique. When the uninitiated opens a book on tantra and reads ‘drinking the wine’, the symbology is not understood, this gives rise to the discrepancy between the eastern view of tantra and the prevailing western view of tantra. Tantra is a vast subject that allows one to explore the human consciousness and to free the abundant energy which is within us, and ultimately to evolve and discover the culmination of life.

How can one destroy the ego?

Why does everything have to be destroyed? Why can’t the ego be used in a positive way? It is often said that the ego has to be eradicated, but it is not the correct thing to say. The Sanskrit word for ego is *ahamkara*; it indicates who we are. *Akara* means ‘form’ or ‘shape’; and *aham* is the ‘I’, the identity. Therefore, ‘I’ or ‘me’, the individual, cannot be without *ahamkara*, without ego. The moment the ego goes, we also go. Ego is like the main supporting beam of the house; if you destroy it the roof and walls will collapse. So to begin with the ego should not be destroyed; rather the negative ego should be transformed into a positive ego.

Transforming the ego

What is the negative ego? Self-assertiveness, arrogance. Whenever ‘I’ becomes the predominant factor that is the negative ego. ‘I’ at the expense of others; that has to change. The vision may change so that ‘I’ am not the central figure anymore; I consider myself to be one of the group. If I consider myself to be one of the group then humility, proper association and communication has to develop. As the negative traits of the ego are lessened, the ego becomes pure. That is the ideal state that one is searching for, rather than trying to destroy the ego. To ‘kill the ego’ is often used as an expression, for example Swami Sivananda used to sing, ‘Kill this little ‘I’ to live the divine life’. However, in this context killing does not mean the effort to crush something. Ego is

not a walnut that you can crack with a hammer. It needs to be looked at it in another way.

In order for a sprout to come out the seed has to die. When you plant a seed it has a hard shell. Yet when the conditions and the timing are right, that hard shell cracks and a sprout comes up. The same applies to your life too. When the 'spiritual sprouting' is taking place, the hard shell of the ego may crack; once the sprouting is complete and spiritual attainment has become absolute, you will not find any remnants of the seed in the ground – a greater creation has taken place from that tiny seed. In the same way, the negative ego has to be cracked and the positive ego has to be cultivated. A negative ego is selfish and 'me'-centric, a positive ego is selfless and 'God'-centric. There has to be a change from me to the divine, from my perception to a more universal perception. Meditation, prayer, cultivation of awareness, understanding of the appropriate response to situations and events – all these factors play a major role in the transformation of the negative ego.

When Swami Satyananda came to Swami Sivananda for sannyasa, he asked, "What am I supposed to do after taking sannyasa?" Swami Sivananda said, "You will be doing everything as you have always been doing: work in the kitchen, work in the office, work in the publication department, work as secretary, work as this, work as that." Swami Satyananda responded, "Well, if I have to do the same thing here which I was doing at home, I may as well go back and do it there. At least that way I will look after some people." Swami Sivananda said, "No. When you are there you will be doing the work for yourself. You will be subject to the success and failure of your actions, and you will be affected by it. Your ego will either increase or decrease depending on whether it is a success or failure. Nothing will happen. However, if you continue to do the same thing here, the understanding will be that you are not working for yourself, your work is being offered to guru and to humanity. You will not be responsible for your success or failure, or for your ego trips."

The butler at home only follows the command of the master, and the success and failure belong to the master. In the same manner, if you can develop the attitude that you are not working for your own gratification, fulfilment or satisfaction, that you are offering your work for humanity or the divine, then the ego can be managed more effectively and efficiently.

The value of the instruction which was given to Swami Satyananda more than sixty years ago can be clearly seen today. The ego has to be managed rather than destroyed. The positive virtues of ego should be highlighted and the negative, limiting qualities of ego should be transformed. Mantra, meditation, prayers, service, having the right attitude, having the right awareness – all these things play a major role in helping us manage the manifestations of ego.

Do techniques such as meditation and yoga activate the cerebro-spinal fluid and allow greater right brain function or is this a misinterpretation?

A lot of research still has to be done to validate this point. People have only speculated that in meditation, as the nervous system and circulatory system slow down, the sympathetic activity of the body becomes less and there is an increase of parasympathetic activity, so the electrical impulses in the brain change. Science speaks of four major brain waves that sensitive equipment has discovered and measured, although there are others also. These are Beta, Alpha, Theta and Delta brain waves, which have a certain range of frequencies that can be observed. Beyond and below that range are other brain waves which also become active. As our equipment becomes sensitive enough to capture more minute and subtle movements other brain waves will be discovered.

If brain wave patterns can bring about changes in physiology, it can also be influenced through different practices and movements. For example, there is a practice of hatha yoga called *trataka*. For many years yogis have

said that it will help one to internalize and lessen the hyperactivity of the mind. With the practice of *trataka*, the output of melatonin, which is responsible for the relaxed condition of body and mind, increases. Melatonin is a hormone which is produced in absolute pitch darkness and during the darkest period in the morning between around twelve and three. That is the time you actually relax. Prior to that you may be tossing and turning, going through rapid eye movements and the different sleep patterns. However, once melatonin is secreted there is relaxation of the body, muscles, nerves, brain and mind. Melatonin is naturally secreted in the middle of the night, yet with *trataka* it becomes possible to stimulate the output of melatonin at other times.

Gradually through research, as knowledge of the body and mind becomes more subtle, new information will be made available and we shall discover many more things. Cerebro-spinal fluid is one of the most important transmitting systems in the body; and in meditation when it is possible to slow down the heartbeat and to stop breathing for one hour, then something definitely happens in the cerebro-spinal fluid, which keeps the body and brain active.

In the USA in 1980, one *sannyasi* was the subject of research conducted by Dr Elmer Green at the Meninger Foundation. This *swami* was supposed to be a master of breath control and so they experimented on him. The researchers made three airtight chambers and placed a candle in one, a monkey in another and the *sannyasi* in the third chamber. The *sannyasi*'s body was covered completely in wax and all the orifices were plugged from top to bottom. Electrodes were placed all over his body and then he was asked to play the *tabla*. Playing *tabla* is not an easy job. When you are drumming, you sweat a lot and use a lot of energy.

In that airtight chamber with everything plugged up, he practised internal retention of the breath for one hour. After two or three minutes the candle flame flickered out. That means there was no more oxygen left. After about five

to seven minutes, the monkey in the other airtight chamber became unconscious. That means there was a high level of carbon dioxide in the chamber. Regardless, the sannyasi played the tabla inside the chamber without breathing for one hour. There were microphones on different parts of his body and the sound that was emitted was like the mantra *Aum*. Just a continuous ‘mmmm’ sound. They put a coin on top of his head and as he was playing, the coin started to jump up and down three or four inches. That swami was Swami Nadabrahmananda, a disciple of Swami Sivananda.

The scientist claimed that Swami Nadabrahmananda was able to survive due to prana, which is spoken of as the vital force. Prana is different to breathing; how it can be tapped into is not yet known to science. Scientists say that prana is a negative ion, but that refers to the time you are breathing. What happens when you do not breathe in? How does that negative ion come into the body or is it produced in the body? There are many questions; however, the point is that there is a force which is separate from the body and breath and our involvement and interaction with the body. That force can be awakened, and when alive, sustains and nourishes the body.

When Swami Nadabrahmananda came out of the airtight chamber he was absolutely normal. At present there is no equipment that can measure his condition. With today’s scientific knowledge, the parameters of the physical body, *annamaya kosha*, can be measured. The basics of the energy body, *pranamaya kosha*, can be measured through the Kirlian photography system. Superficially the mental body, *manomaya kosha*, can also be measured. However, in the future, some equipment may be developed that can better measure the manomaya kosha as well as the vijñanamaya kosha. Then we shall know what is happening in the body and why these feats that look impossible are not.

When Edison came out with the first light bulb it seemed an impossible feat had been accomplished. People wondered, ‘How can this glass item be lit? Where is it being lit from and

where is the current coming from?’ It was a basic structure, a bulb with two wires and a battery, yet it was a miracle in that age. Similarly, when Graham Bell popularized telephones and the telegraph system it was like a miracle to hear the voice of somebody so many thousands of kilometres away. Initially when things are developing, everything seems mysterious and miraculous. Then over time, as the discovery is shaped into a system and a process, it becomes a natural thing.

Swamiji, we have heard that there are some new stars. I was wondering if you knew anything about them?

Well, you will find quite a few new stars in Hollywood, but those stars are on the ground. There are also some new stars named up in the sky. One star in the constellation of Virgo has been named Swami Sivananda and one star in the constellation of Capricorn has been named Swami Satyananda. These are the two major ones that are up in the sky. They were named by the Astronomical Society on the occasion of Guru Poornima in July this year. So, whenever you want to experience the grace of the gurus all you have to do is look up to Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda in their respective constellations.

I heard there was a third star, Swamiji.

There are many. There are many up there yet only two are important.

No there is a third.

Oh! That one. Well, you are right, but I only consider two. The third one is in the constellation of Aquarius by the name of Swami Niranjana; however, that is not the important one. The important ones are Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda.

—30 September 2008

Is wisdom the source of compassion?

There are things that are taught and there are things that manifest naturally when wisdom is there; and if you have the wisdom, compassion is the outcome. When you look at a poor man begging on the street, what do you feel? Is that compassion? That is not compassion, it is pity. When you say that somebody is sick and suffering, what do you feel? It is not compassion, it is pity. Compassion is the outcome of a person who is at peace with himself or herself. It is the response of a person who is connected not to one but with everyone. Your connection is mainly with your close and dear ones with whom you identify: friends, children, partner, parents, family members, and so on. You feel for them as they represent your security. You do not feel for a stranger what you feel for somebody you consider your own. That means the expression of your affection and love is lopsided. It is confined to those with whom you associate. Therefore, the word 'compassion' has been given a different meaning for three different contexts: the yogic context, Indian context and ashram context.

The yogic context or perspective can be found in the *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali where there is a sutra on human behaviour and relationships. It says: maitri, karuna, mudita, upeksha, sukha, dukha, pinya, apinya. *Maitri* means friendship. Friendship with whom? Friendship with a person who is happy, content and prosperous, who does not have any demands in life. Prosperity does not mean money. Prosperity means not having demands in life. You can have millions, yet if there are still demands in your life you will never be considered prosperous. Your pockets may be empty, yet if you have no demands you are prosperous. The sutra says to be friendly with those who are prosperous, meaning those who are free from demands, who are content and happy. Also, one should be compassionate toward those who are suffering and in pain, be happy for those who are virtuous and pious, and ignore those situations which you cannot change or transform.

Compassion includes wisdom

Suffering can be multidimensional: personal, social, physical, mental, emotional, local and global. Suffering can take any form, and the action you take to alleviate the suffering should be compassionate. However, compassionate action should be assisted and guided by wisdom; compassionate action is not a random reaction.

One person was sick in the ashram and a doctor was called. The doctor went and saw the person, prescribed some medication and left. The person took the medications for two or three days and then another visitor went to this person and said, "Oh, you are sick. Your eyes look a bit yellow. I think you have jaundice." So, what happened when the doctor came? The patient said, "Doctor, please check me for jaundice." The doctor said, "You do not have jaundice. You are only having a bit of stomach difficulty." The patient said, "No, no doctor. People are saying that I look yellow. Please check me for jaundice." The doctor said, "No. You do not have jaundice," to which the patient replied, "You do not know anything!"

How dare a person go to a patient and say, "Oh, your eyes look yellow and you look sick, maybe you have jaundice." What nonsense is that? A doctor is looking after the person. Fear is being created in the garb of friendship. People believe that this kind of act is friendship, that it is communication and openness, yet when your words create panic in someone else's mind and make that person disbelieve and mistrust the authority who is treating them, is that appropriate or is that wrong? Is that a wise action or a thoughtless action? The same applies to compassion. People do not know what compassion really is as they have never experienced it. People have only experienced pity in their life.

When children cry their parents come, pat them on the head and say, "Oh, you poor little child." The child snuggles up against the parent's body and says, "Oh, wonderful. Now, I am safe and secure." The idea that a person is going to protect us in some way is seen as an act of compassion. No.

People's understanding of compassion is not appropriate or accurate. Compassion is a tool, a force or power that is used to overcome or remove distress from life.

The yogic perspective

In the Upanishads there is a story. One representative of the gods, one representative of the demons, and one representative of the humans go to meet their Creator, with a question in mind: How should we live our life? While the delegation is walking, there is a massive thunder storm. It is raining and cold, and there is nowhere to stay. There are no tents, no vehicles, no houses, no inns – only forest and deep jungle with animals everywhere. As they are assessing the situation, there is a loud thunderclap. In the thunderclap they each receive a message from their Creator, and with that the representatives go back to their community.

The god returns to heaven and there they have a big gathering of all the different gods from the North, South, East and West – ancient and modern both, as the gods are eternal. The gods ask their messenger, “What did the Maker say? What was the message for us?” The representative of the gods replies, “Well, in the thunderclap I heard the command: Restraint.” That was the message of the Creator for the gods: ‘Learn how to control yourself, learn how to apply restraint, learn to know when to stop and when to move.’

The delegate of the demons goes back down to hell and there all the demons meet and ask, “What is the message for us from our Creator?” The representative says to the demon crowd, “Well, in the thunderclap I heard the command: Be compassionate.” All the demons receive this command, however, being demons, they twist the whole thing around and ‘Be compassionate’ becomes ‘Become passionate’. Similarly, the human representative comes down to earth and everybody asks, “What was the message for us from our Creator?” The human representative replies that the message for human beings was to be selfless rather than selfish, and to learn the art of giving.

These were the three mandates from the Creator; however, these mandates can only be fulfilled if there is wisdom, *vidya*. With wisdom these mandates change the quality and condition of life. It is up to you to see how you are able to express that. So this story gives you the yogic perspective.

The ashram perspective

In the ashram each person has to fulfil their duty and their role; a doctor's role is to provide treatment to the sick. No-one else should give advice on that unless they are more competent than the doctor. This principle can be applied to other situations too. If someone is competent enough, then advice is not needed, and if one is not competent enough, one should be ready to learn from others. It is your expression and response that you need to observe, rather than thinking about the over-abundance or absence of compassion, love and kindness. In some places it is over-abundant, in some places it is absent; however, in each situation it is the individual who is at the centre and if that individual is balanced and knowledgeable enough, the response will be appropriate. On the other hand, if that individual is lost in a personal train of thought and is not wise enough, then compassion can also be detrimental.

Compassion is something that increases as the feeling of oneness grows between people. Sri Swamiji said that when you begin to feel for everyone what you feel for your own people, then that develops into unconditioned love, affection and compassion. When you only feel for your own people, then it is conditioned love, affection and compassion, restricted to you and the group with which you identify. That conditioned love and compassion always carries a demand and expectation with it. That distorted form of love and compassion is better known as pity. Unconditioned love and compassion does not carry any demand. In its pure form it is a transformative force that can change the detrimental and the distressful situations in life.

—23 October 2008

In *Yoga Darshan*, in the chapter about karma yoga, you have written about the technique of observing the mental stimulation and about overcoming boredom in repeated actions. Could you please explain this in more detail? How can we effectively understand and stop mental dissipation?

There is a process in psychology which is called habituation. For example, you enter a room where some incense is burning in a corner of the room. You cannot see the incense stick, however, the moment you walk in the room the smell hits you. You might spend half an hour in the room and as the time goes by your awareness of the smell diminishes. The smell is still there; the incense is burning and your olfactory glands are still acknowledging the quality and content of the smell, yet you are not registering it. The mind has become habituated to the smell so the attention given to the smell is less and therefore you are not conscious of it. The mind has moved to another source of stimulation. When habituation takes place with that sensation, the mind will move to a third object of attraction and attention.

Each sense organ and sense perception, and each expression and faculty of the mind is guided by this principle of habituation. When habituation occurs, dissipation from the present also happens. You become less aware of the first impact of events or experiences. Dissipation takes place as the mind is looking for newer sources of stimulation: newer thoughts, newer ideas and newer ways to stimulate itself.

This psychological process can be applied to everything. Students can apply it to their studies, as their attention span decreases as time goes by. When the mind is fresh the awareness, attention span and ability to retain information is greater. When the mind is under stress or distressed, the attention span and the level of awareness becomes less. Lessening of the level of awareness means dissipation of mind. Do not allow yourself to be dissipated; instead maintain a continuous, constant and homogeneous awareness of the present. The 'present moment' is not the present minute or present hour. It is the moment-to-moment

existence, which is the more identifiable, liveable and experienceable aspect of living in the present. Therefore, in order to excel in life two things have to be cultivated: relaxation and awareness. These two will give birth to concentration, and concentration will lead you to creativity.

Relaxation

Relaxation is important for removing the mind from distractions and the experience of distress, and for maintaining mental awareness of what is happening in the present moment. Stress is created when awareness of the present wavers and one begins to dwell on the past or live in the future. Fears, insecurities, complexes and inhibitions come up when there are overpowering thoughts of the future or the past; that is when the nervous system is stressed, the brain works overtime, and the behaviour is altered.

The whole human body, the brain and the mind are composed of energy. Matter is a condensed form of energy. Everything is a manifestation of energy, which is nervous, mental, emotional, psychic, bio-electric, and so on. This energy is affected by external factors which create stress and imbalances, and the whole body becomes drained of energy and vitality. The body and mind is like a battery of pure *shakti*, energy; when a torch is left on the whole night the battery will go flat. Normally a torch is only used when it is required and for short periods of time. Used as a night lamp and left on the whole night, the battery will only last for some hours. On the other hand, if you use it for ten or fifteen minutes every day the battery will last months.

Therefore, to excel in life, the first effort or *sadhana* is to acquire the ability to relax consciously and wilfully. Allow your senses and mind to rest. Conserve the energy of the battery. How do you allow yourself to rest and to conserve energy? Not by sleeping; rather, by freeing yourself from those situations and conditions that create stress, that are the 'stressors' in your life. Relaxation should give you the ability to make yourself free from stressors.

Awareness

The second effort is awareness. Awareness is both prevention and enhancement. Awareness prevents the influence of that which is restrictive and detrimental, and also enhances the positive, the qualitative and the good. If you cultivate awareness you are actually converting your weaknesses into positive strengths; you are converting the tamasic into the sattwic. Awareness plays an important role, as it breaks down reactive actions and conditionings. It allows you to be a witness to your own actions, behaviours and attitudes. When you are a witness, you are watching yourself and aware of what is happening. Relaxation and awareness are the beginning of yoga sadhana. Pratyahara, which leads to *dharana*, concentration, emphasizes both relaxation and awareness.

Concentration: one pointed awareness

There is a story of several princes learning archery from a master. The time came for an exam to decide who was the best archer. The master placed a clay bird on a distant branch of a tall tree. The archers were told they had to hit the bird's eye with the arrow. After placing the bird on the branch, the teacher called one archer and said, "Prepare to shoot." The archer took his stance, adjusted his body posture, picked up the bow, notched up an arrow and was ready, waiting for the command to shoot. The teacher asked, "What do you see?" The archer replied, "I see everything – the tree, the branches, the leaves, the bird, people around me. Even though I'm focused on the bird's eye, I can see everything and everyone on the periphery." The master said, "Put down your arrow."

Like this he called all the princes one by one. The princes came and tried to shoot the arrow, but every time the master would ask the same question, "What do you see?" Somebody would say, "I see the clouds in the sky, the birds flying." And the master kept saying, "Put down your arrow." The last archer came and the master said, "Pick up the bow and arrow and be ready to shoot. Describe to me truthfully exactly what you see." Everybody was expecting to hear a similar answer

like, “I see the tree, I see the branch, I see the leaves, I see the twigs, I see the bird,” but this shooter said only one thing, “I see nothing but the eye of the bird.” He had shut himself off to everything else, and the master said, “Shoot.” The archer let the arrow fly and the arrow hit the eye of the bird. The name of the archer was Arjuna.

This story indicates that concentration is total fixation of the mind despite the senses and the mind being active. The senses are active, they are not dull, but concentration is total fixation of the mind on the object of its involvement. If you are working, work with total concentration, total awareness and total relaxation. Do not allow any work-stress to affect you. Try to maintain a relaxed state of mind.

If there is a traffic jam on the way to the airport, people often have panic attacks. They look at their watch every ten seconds saying, “Oh, it is taking too long!” This is not going to clear the traffic jam. If the flight is lost, it can be lost in a relaxed way or in a stressed out way; and if the flight is caught, it would be better to reach the airport with a smile on the face, rather than being totally frazzled. Panic does not change the situation, it changes the person. Stay cool, calm and collected. When the arrow has to be pulled be ready to pull; when the arrow has to be released, release it. The process shouldn’t cost you your relaxed and aware state of mind. Yoga has emphasized in all its systems, traditions and practices the need for relaxation and awareness, leading to concentration, excellence and creativity.

How does one understand a real spiritual experience and how does one know when it is just a fantasy?

It becomes known. Fantasies or figments of the imagination always carry some flaw in them, whereas real experiences will be so overpowering that they will change the course of your life. An imaginary imposition can only create temporary change.

When the spiritual experience is real, it is overpowering and it changes the way you think. It changes the way you live:

your personal discipline, your behaviour and your attitude. The imaginary experience will fade after some time – one week, one month, six months. Generally people fall flat after six months. After six months, another imaginary experience has replaced the first one, something bigger and more attractive. In the last experience, your angel did not have wings. In this experience the angel will have huge, white wings. In the third experience, you will add a halo to the angel's head. Imaginary experiences will keep on building; however, real ones will entirely change your ideas and perceptions. This is the difference and time will show you if what you have experienced is real.

Swamiji, can you please give us some perspective on what is happening in the world today.

You cannot create and develop a perspective within your own lives, so why worry about the world? Social and political changes continue; sometimes there is system, harmony, justice, morality and discipline, and sometimes there is a breakdown, just as night follows day and day follows night. Each change is given a name and that name identifies it as a social or political event that touches everybody's life. The issues can be different. The issue at the time of the primitive person was finding a good five-star cave to live in, a five-star cave with a good view up on a cliff-side with easy access. Today the view and the need is different, yet the same political, social and religious problems exist.

Some people say a lot of good things are happening, and some people say lot of bad things are happening. However, what actually touches our life and what can insure a better life for future generations? You can become responsible for what touches your life and you can try to improve that within the restrictions and conditions that are placed by society.

Restraint and happiness

There has to be some regulatory check in every system. Every car needs to have a brake; without a brake there will be a car

accident. Equally, every social, political or religious system needs certain restrictions that people have to understand. In your house you have certain rules to maintain the sanity of the family members. If there are no rules and everyone is doing what they wish to do, there will be no routine, system, discipline or regulation. There will be nothing but total chaos. How long can you be comfortable like that? Therefore, checks and brakes have to be there in everything. This is something that people will have to think about.

Even in the past, in the civilizations that existed before us, whether they were imaginary or real, whether they were the Roman Empire or Atlantis, they had their checks and brakes, their systems and regulations. Whether it is this civilization or a previous one, every individual has to adjust and live according to the checks and brakes placed on that society. Everyone has to be responsible not only for their own happiness, but also for the happiness of other people. If other people are unhappy, you can be certain that their unhappiness will touch you one day.

The pain and suffering of the other person is going to affect you sooner or later. If you can share the positive, the good, the virtuous, then yes, the sun will rise earlier than the scheduled time. The time of sunrise changes according to the season; however, if you are able to bring in happiness and be concerned about other people along with your own self, the span of night will become shorter and the span of day will become longer. If you only consider your own happiness and ignore other people's happiness, then the span of night will be longer and the span of daytime will be shorter.

This may be a Utopian idea but that does not mean it is inaccessible. It is accessible, and each one can make the attempt, and that is the solution to all problems. After all, what is the need of every individual apart from social security such as shelter, clothing, food and finance? The other need of every individual is respect, love, friendship and recognition. If you do not get love, respect and friendship, you rebel. If each person can be given friendship and

respect, in whatever quantity, that will change the heart and mind of everyone. However, there is one problem – people do not know how to look in the right place. When one door of happiness closes, another one definitely opens up, but people keep looking at the door that has closed, and fail to see the door that has opened. If you know how to look, if you know how to maintain your dignity and allow other people to develop their own dignity, then yes, situations can change, society can change.

Serve, love and give

This was one of Swami Sivananda's visions that has been put into practice by Swami Satyananda. The philosophy of Swami Sivananda was: Serve, Love and Give. Give what? Give your friendship, respect and love to people who lack that in life. If you give these three things then you can uplift another person's life. Swami Sivananda said that through 'Serve, Love and Give' you purify yourself, you become good and you do good. So, if you do three things, you achieve three things. What do you do? You serve, you love and you give. What do you achieve? You purify, become good and do good – you achieve goodness in expression. He also said to meditate for your spiritual development, and meditation will lead you to realization. Just as Sage Patanjali's eight-fold path is yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi, the eight limbs of Swami Sivananda's yoga are serve, love, give, purify, be good, do good, meditate, realize.

Swami Satyananda lived the three cardinal principles of 'Serve, Love and Give', and those people who have associated with this vision and mission have definitely felt that they are attaining inner purity, becoming good and doing good. That feeling, that conviction and awareness is rising. Good does not only happen in big measures, it also happens in small measures. By living the first three principles of Swami Sivananda, the next three are automatically and naturally attained. These principles bring people together and develop

a force of conviction, faith and belief – not in God, but in humanity itself, in the quality of humanity.

Belief in the quality of humanity is better, higher and more satisfying than belief in God. God is always there as the last resource. There is no need to even think about it, God is always there. Whenever you want to see God, you only have to open the doors of your heart, and that is not too difficult. On the other hand, it is difficult to see the qualitative goodness in humanity, but it has been found, through the ages, that a qualitative life can be achieved; Swami Sivananda called it the Divine Life.

—29 October 2008

What is the true form of God?

There is a saying: *Jaki rahi bhavana jaisi prabhu morat deki tin jaisi* – ‘According to your sentiment you are able to perceive the face of your beloved.’ This applies to God, too. Depending on your sentiment, you perceive God however you want: male, female, one, many, and so on. However, despite all the forms that one tries to conceive, not a single one is the only correct and accurate one. All the people in the world are classified under the category ‘human’, yet no two people are alike; they are all different. In human-ness there is multiplicity, not singularity. There can be singularity of identity, but not singularity of features. It is the same with God, too.

Vedanta says that God is only one and the rest is all illusion. Many religions have also proclaimed that God is only one. The ultimate truth and reality is that God is ultimately one, just as the essence of water will be the essence of water whether it is in the ocean, a glass, a jar or a cup. The essence is not going to change according to its container. The essence of God is experienced when one cultivates faith, and divine vision comes with faith, whereby you are able to perceive the reflection of divinity in everything.

—4 November 2008

What is the difference between love and attraction?

To begin with, what does love mean to you? How you have lived it and expressed it in your life? Maybe if you look at your own understanding and response to the word 'love,' you will understand that it is difficult to transform the basic quality of love, as from our childhood until now, the concept of love has been emotional, sensorial, sensual and physical.

Various behaviours of an individual can be interpreted as 'loving' and 'unloving' behaviours, yet is that the real meaning of the word 'love'? The word 'love' indicates the flowering and maturing of one's emotions and one's heart. If the emotions are matured, if the heart is open, one experiences love, and this love is not conditioned or unconditional. It is only one word – love.

Conditional and unconditional love

Love becomes conditional when that feeling, that awakening of the heart and maturity of emotion is directed towards personal gratification, personal happiness, personal satisfaction and personal fulfilment. When the same love connects you with other people and your personal involvement is not primary anymore, love becomes unconditional and selfless. When there is no expectation and you are not thinking that you are giving love to receive something in return, when you feel happy that you have been given the opportunity to nurture and develop love in your life, this love is uniform and spreads everywhere equally, and is unconditional.

The mind and emotions are conditioned to behave and expect in a conditioned manner. Even your associations with friends and relatives are based on small expectations that you may not be aware of consciously. With this mentality, to realize unconditional love is not possible. You may derive inspiration from someone else who has experienced and lived it; however, when you attempt to walk that path of unconditional feeling yourself, you discover that it is a great sadhana to change the quality, behaviour and nature of the conditioned mind. Until and unless you put yourself through

this sadhana, no matter what kind of garb you put on, the donkey will remain a donkey.

It's hard to change

The owner of a farm had many donkeys and large fields. Every night he would put the donkeys in the field to graze and to rest, and every day he would make them work hard. This man and his donkeys had lived happily for many years following this routine until one day there was a drought and there was no more food for the donkeys. So, at night, in order to feed his donkeys, he would put them in someone else's field and by morning time collect them and bring them home. The other farmers soon became wise to this and started to scare the donkeys away whenever they would stray into their fields. Gradually many of the donkeys died due to starvation. The farmer saw his population of donkeys dwindling and began to think, 'What should I do? What can I feed them?' He desperately needed the donkeys to work in the fields so that he could earn money.

He came up with an idea and went to the taxidermist and bought four tiger skins. He returned back home and when night came he put the tiger skin on his donkeys and then let them free to wander in the fields. The other farmers were ready with their sticks to scare off any donkeys that strayed into their fields, but when they saw four tigers they quickly ran away, leaving the donkeys to have a great time eating. Then suddenly in the distance, another donkey brayed. All four donkeys lifted up their heads and start to bray. Now who has seen four tigers bray? Naturally, all the villagers came back and scared the donkeys away.

The moral of the story is, 'once a donkey, always a donkey'. You can put on any garb, but this will not change your basic nature. It is the same thing in spiritual life. Many times people come up with the idea to 'love everybody'. If this idea comes, fine; however, people do not go about it in the appropriate manner. Therefore, in the present situation and circumstances developing unconditional love is not possible.

Expand your attachments

Once you have a spiritual experience that allows you to glimpse a connection with unknown people and unknown entities in life, the second part of the 'love' education begins. Developing more attachment is the secret. Generally, you are attached to a few people in your limited world: father, mother, friend, partner, wife, husband or children. Whenever something happens, these are the people with whom you identify and relate. Other people have no role to play in your life. It is attachment that connects you with people; therefore, use this power of attachment to connect with other people.

At the same time, avoid the pitfalls of attachment: expectations and dependency. If you can avoid dependency and expectations and continue with your attachment, maybe you can have a glimpse of unconditional love. If you are able to do this for a day or a week, it does not mean that you have become an expert at it. It has to become part of your nature. Take this example: In one glass of water you put ten drops of black ink. What will happen to the water? All the water will become black. Now if you want to convert the black water back into clear water, what do you do? You tip that glass of black water into a huge bucket of water. It will mix, merge and become clear again. Attachments are to be dealt with in the same manner.

Beyond your 'own people', begin to attach yourself to one more person, then one more, then one more, and so on. Do not be dependent on them or have any expectations; rather live for them just as you live for yourself and your dear ones. It is not going to be easy, yet in this manner you will be gradually expanding your sphere of attachment and connecting with more people. This will spread your sentiments more widely and reduce your own phobias and insecurities that come along with attachment. Nevertheless, this is possible only for those who have had some understanding, experience, exposure and realization. Then transforming the quality of love becomes possible.

Love and attraction

As far as the difference in the word ‘love’ and ‘attraction’ is concerned, love is the opening of one’s heart, indicating purity, connection, positivity and inspiration, whereas attraction is only the mind following its whims: ‘That person is beautiful!’ or ‘That person is nice!’ There is a cause of attraction just as there is a cause of repulsion, and these causes of attraction and repulsion are created by the mind through the senses, ambitions, needs and passions. It can be complicated. There are too many letters in the word ‘attraction’, and there are only four letters in the word ‘love’. It is less complicated.

This year there was a long program in Rikhia with two yajnas – Sat Chandi Mahayajna and Mahamrityunjaya Homa. Could you help us to understand the meaning behind this double event?

In order to understand the event of Sat Chandi Yajna and the addition of Yoga Poornima, you have to go back in time to 1989 when Sri Swamiji came to Rikhia and started performing many sadhanas and practices prescribed for Paramahansa sannyasins. During these practices he had certain revelations, all of which carried one message: Whatever you do, your action should bring peace, plenty and prosperity to society, to the community and to the people. This was the underlying message that he received in all his revelations, and in 1995 the first Sat Chandi Mahayajna was conducted and became the foundation for other yajnas in Rikhia. At that time, Sri Swamiji took the sankalpa that the Sat Chandi Mahayajna, the invocation of cosmic energy, would be conducted for twelve years and would become the medium for the Rajasooya Yajna in 2007.

Rajasooya Yajna and giving

What is Rajasooya? It is a ritual that used to be performed by kings and emperors who would, after conquering other lands and acquiring much wealth and prosperity, come back

to their armies and kingdoms and share the wealth with society. This tradition of sharing is the Rajasooya Yajna, and what is the wealth that Sri Swamiji has acquired? Spiritual wealth and material wealth, both. Material wealth has been given to him by people who know and trust that it will be put to the right use, and spiritual wealth has been given by his guru and God, and acquired through his own efforts. It is the sharing of this wealth, spiritual and material, which is the tradition of the Rajasooya Yajna.

This giving started in 1995 with the idea of helping one village with twenty houses, twenty families; over thirteen years the work has spread to over sixty-thousand families. If you consider that families have an average of four members, this means that at present approximately 240,000 people are directly receiving help. The area has seen an upliftment in lifestyle, mentality, spirit, feeling and energy, which is unparalleled anywhere in this country. Nobody would believe the type of life these people lived thirteen or fourteen years ago. Several women in one family living in the same house would share a single sari as they had no clothes. In many homes the cooking fire would not burn for three days, which meant that there was nothing to eat. Children used to drink water and go to sleep thinking that their tummy was full. That was the inherited environment. Today these sixty-thousand families are supported due to a sankalpa. There is no crime. There is no dependency. Nobody is a labourer or servant any more. Everyone is earning something due to their own efforts, and a lot of prosperity has come into the area.

Sat Chandi Mahayajna

It was the giving of the Rajasooya Yajna that brought the change, and the medium of the Rajasooya Yajna was the Sat Chandi Mahayajna. The Chandi Yajna is an ancient, tantric ritual. For the sake of convenience and understanding the practices of tantra are classified; however, those that invoke the higher forces do not belong to any particular tradition.

Rather they have become the foundation of a tradition – the Sat Chandi Mahayajna has become the foundation of the Shakta tradition of tantra and the Mahamrityunjaya Homa has become the foundation of the Shaiva sect of the tantras.

Sat Chandi is a powerful ceremony. Through the chanting of the mantras cosmic power is invoked, and when that cosmic power descends and takes form in the altar, it is in the form of vibrations and it chooses its own form in which to appear. There is no planning at that time. Whatever happens is happening as it is supposed to happen. There is no human intervention at that particular moment. When that power is combined with the sankalpa of peace, plenty and prosperity, it becomes a blessing and reaches out to everybody.

The mantra of peace, plenty and prosperity is *Aim Hrim Klim*, and when this is chanted then it is this sankalpa that comes through. These two events, the Chandi and the Rajasooya, together become the *Mahayajna*, the Great Yajna. The Chandi is done more specifically for the upliftment of the community and people as it invokes three powers: the power of wisdom, the power of prosperity, and the power of transformation. It is conducted for the upliftment of everyone who comes to participate in the program. Everyone is either a direct or indirect recipient of the blessings of the yajna.

Another aspect of the yajna is Sita Kalyanam, the marriage of Sita with Rama, an event that is conducted on the last day, sometimes with the marriage of real people and sometimes symbolically. It represents the empowerment of womankind in the rural cultural set up. Women in rural India are backward, illiterate and uneducated, and they have to undergo a lot of hardship. This last activity of Sat Chandi is for the empowerment and the freedom of womankind from the shackles of the traditional social systems. Therefore, it is a spiritual event, a tantric event, a social event, a charitable event and an educational event, everything happening together.

Yoga Poornima and Mahamrityunjaya Homa

The second component added this year was Yoga Poornima, to invoke the Shiva energy to commemorate or celebrate the first official birthday of Sri Swamiji. It is peculiar for a westerner to hear that in India people do not have birth certificates; the tradition of having birth certificates started in the 1980s only. Prior to that, there were no birth certificates. Naturally, in 1923 birth certificates were non-existent, and so nobody knew the day or date when Sri Swamiji was born. After many years, an old astrological chart was found, which the family guru of every family makes for the children. On that old piece of paper the time and the date of his birthday was discovered, which according to the solar calendar happened to be Christmas night, and based on the lunar calendar, the full moon of December. In accordance with the Indian tradition, Sri Swamiji's birthday is celebrated on the full moon as a five-day event called Yoga Poornima: *poornima* refers to the full moon, *yoga* is yoga – the full moon of yoga.

The effort that the first generation of yoga teachers in the world have made to propagate yoga has been commendable. For 40 years, in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, there were only a few authorities on yoga in the world. It was after the 1990s and more recently that many yoga teachers have come into existence. Swami Satyananda was a person who had a major influence in the field of yoga, and his contribution to the development of yoga was immense.

Historically, Sri Swamiji contributed more than anyone else; even Swatmarama and Gheranda compiled only one book each with about thirty postures, and became famous for that. Sage Patanjali only compiled one book and is recognized for that. For the first time in history, however, Swami Satyananda defined the practices of pratyahara, the dharanas, the dhyanas, and classified the different systems of yoga, including pranayama. His initial group of teachers were the first throughout the world to teach pranayama.

Prior to that the general thought was that you would go crazy if you practised pranayama.

Swami Satyananda was a person who lived yoga his whole life. There is not a day or a moment in his life which you could say was un-yogic. Never did an un-yogic sentence, attitude, idea or expression come into his life, and those of us who have known him for a long time stand witness to this. He lived yoga, he is living yoga, and Yoga Poornima is the celebration of the life of a person who became the example of living yoga.

The full moon indicates the completion of the journey from the dark moon to the bright moon, and that is the journey of the soul as well – the journey of the dark night of the soul to the bright light of the soul. This Yoga Poornima, the full moon celebration, is dedicated to Shiva, and the system of worship that is followed is from the original tantra, the first tantra, the Pashupat Tantra, which was expounded in the world by Shiva to his disciple Parvati. This Shaiva tantra is the original tantra from which all other tantras have evolved, and the basic philosophy and practices of Shaivism are contained in Pashupat Tantra.

–17 December 2008

Can we practise Mahamrityunjaya mantra chanting outside the ashram?

In 1986 Swami Satyananda started the tradition of chanting the Mahamrityunjaya mantra in the ashram every Saturday. It is not a tradition that was started by him, rather it is an old practice from vedic times. Chanting the mantra while performing a yajna connects you to the divine through nature, and it has been the tradition of the vedic culture and also the ashram culture to practise the Mahamrityunjaya mantra with havan one day a week. Swami Satyananda selected Saturday in accordance with the Indian *tithis*, calendar. The effects of Saturn on human life are rigorous. They are not specifically malefic or benevolent, but they

are intense, and due to the intensity of Saturn, many times the mind loses its clarity, its powers of knowledge, wisdom, observation and creativity, and people feel restricted. People feel that they are unable to grow mentally, emotionally, spiritually and socially. The Mahamrityunjaya mantra is the mantra of Shiva, which invokes the benevolent and transformative powers, to restore balance in life in the form of health, peace and contentment.

Swami Satyananda chose Saturday to chant this mantra with the sankalpa of total wellbeing for the individual who is practising it, and also a sankalpa of wellbeing for those who write to us for some divine intervention to sort out, manage and overcome their own limitations, problems and difficulties. At first this tradition was started only at Ganga Darshan; however, in the course of time other ashrams and centres around the world, including yoga teachers in their homes, also started to conduct Mahamrityunjaya havan every Saturday. If you do it, very good, and you should also encourage your friends to do it at their homes on Saturdays. The Mrityunjaya mantra which is used has the power to harmonize the spikes of suffering, pain and karma in the field of consciousness.

Many different events in relation to the Mahamrityunjaya mantra have been witnessed. One example is that people at the time of death naturally want to chant the Mahamrityunjaya mantra to release the soul gracefully and happily. It has been found that after chanting the Mahamrityunjaya mantra the person is able to leave the body in a better way. Also, it has been found that one can stop death by chanting the Mahamrityunjaya mantra. These are a few brief glimpses into the powers and effects of the Mahamrityunjaya mantra.

In this tradition it is called the ‘Mahamrityunjaya’ mantra, however, it is simply the ‘Mrityunjaya’ mantra: *Om trayambakam yajamahe sugandhim pushtivardhanam urvarukamiva bandhanat mrityor mukshiya mamritat*. This Mrityunjaya mantra becomes the Mahamrityunjaya mantra

when the bija mantras are added to the sentence of the mantra. It has been found to rectify all the defects and imbalances in one's mind, emotions, sentiments, feelings, behaviours and illnesses; and therefore, in the yogic traditions from the Shiva tantras, the Mahamrityunjaya mantra is the most powerful one.

Each tantra has its own words of power. The Shaiva tantras use the Mahamrityunjaya mantra, whereas the Vaishnava groups and the Vaishnava tantras use the Gayatri mantra: *Om bhur bhuvah swaha tatsaviturvareniyam bhargo devasya dhimahi dhiyo yo nah prachodayat*. In this manner, other tantras and other systems also have their preferred mantras. For spiritual sadhakas to have access to higher levels of consciousness the Mahamrityunjaya mantra is the most appropriate one, as it allows one to explore the consciousness with a greater power of conviction, strength, motivation and inspiration. It also helps to cut through the bondage of karmas. You can experiment on yourself to confirm the truth of this.

How can you stop individuality and ego if it is the same force that leads you to self-realization?

You do not stop your individuality or ego, you only convert the limiting and the negative traits of your individuality into positive, uplifting and expansive traits. Here is an example. The force of individuality or ego binds you to this plane, this body, the senses and mind, this mentality and personality, to this nature, this life, and it does not allow you to explore the unknown. Whatever you want to explore has to be known. The intellect is the outward expression of the ego interacting in the world of senses and sense objects. The ego, which is coloured by this intellect, will be tamasic in quality, in nature and in manifestation. It is conditioned, and it is this conditioned mentality that has to change and transform so that the individual becomes sattwic and does not remain tamasic; then the ego becomes sattwic, luminous, pure and not tainted by the influence of the senses and sense objects.

It is the self-oriented ambitions, desires and individual perception that have to change. They have to become transcendental and selfless, and that is the transformation of one's individual self. At no point is there negation of individuality; instead, there is a modification of the natural expression and behaviour of individuality, and this modification is for the better, not for the worse.

I read somewhere that 'swami' means one who has control over one's mind. However, I have seen some swamis getting angry and frustrated. Could you please shed some light on this and help me if I am wrong.

You are not wrong. Nevertheless, you have to learn to appreciate the struggle that people face in their own life. Having the identity of a swami or the initiation of a swami does not make anyone a swami. Many people who want to become swamis and who take this path are unsuccessful as it is a different lifestyle. The values are different, the mentality is different, the morals are different, the philosophy is different, the expectation from oneself and life is different. Externally a swami can look similar to monks from different religious traditions; however, it is not monkhood. There is no equivalent to sannyasa in any other religious or spiritual tradition.

The nature of sannyasa

In the olden days sannyasins were people who left the comforts of their home and society, family and friends, to live in isolation and pursue a different kind of life. Over many hundreds and thousands of years it evolved into a system and tradition where people who were devoted to spiritual causes came to a place called an ashram and lived for some time with the guru to both work and learn. After the period of their training was over, they would leave the ashram and rejoin society, either as a spiritual luminary or as a normal householder. The vocation of sannyasa is something that very few people take, although many wear the robes of a sannyasin.

In India there are over 540,000 sannyasins of the Shaiva tradition; if you include all the other traditions they number over 2,000,000. Out of all these people wearing geru, only around twenty people have actually lived and attained sannyasa. In the *Bhagavad Gita* Krishna says, “There are many devoted to me (meaning God), yet out of the many who are devoted, only a few are intensely aware of God. Out of those few who are intensely aware of God, there are still fewer who make the attempt to reach God. Out of those, there are very few who have a glimpse of God. Out of those, even fewer become one with God.” Therefore, although the journey starts with a million people, all devoted to God, it ends with one person who is united with God.

The razor’s edge

The same applies in sannyasa. After all, who is a sannyasin? It is you, it is me, and we did not drop from heaven, one hundred percent perfect and pure. When we came into this world, we came with our samskaras and karmas, with our cultural and social backgrounds, with our values and understandings. Then suddenly we encountered something that attracted us and we decided to experiment with it, and we became sannyasins for a limited time – four, five, six, ten, twenty years. Yet while living as sannyasins we are still ourselves, and what we came with – our samskaras, karmas, minds, natures, beliefs and conditioning – they do not change overnight. Nevertheless, with all that, there is inspiration and motivation to make the effort and attempt to experience sannyasa no matter how long it takes. In the *Kathopanishad* it is said that the life of a sannyasin is like walking on a razor’s edge; one missed step and you cut yourself and bleed. This indicates that the life of a sannyasin has to be guided by the two principles of *viveka*, discrimination and *vairagya*, non-attachment; when these become the foundation of effort in life, sannyasa becomes real.

Not everybody, however, takes sannyasa to follow the path of sannyasa. There are people who take sannyasa to

wear this geru cloth so that back home they can become prophets. There are people who take sannyasa to become a member of the group of sannyasins. Ninety percent of the people who take sannyasa do not even know what sannyasa is; they take it due to a belief, a trust, an innocence and a faith that by taking it they can make their life spiritual. It is their innocence, faith, conviction and trust that eventually makes them win.

Practise appreciation and compassion

Sannyasins are people who are trying to find a balance between their spiritual life and spiritual experiences and what is expected and demanded of them in their external life. Therefore, when you see a sannyasin frustrated, angry, depressed or sad, do not react. You should feel love and compassion for those who are facing and confronting what they recognize to be their weaknesses or qualities. They are going through a learning process. They are not perfect. Nobody is perfect. If you decide to wear geru today, will you become perfect tomorrow? No. Then why do you expect perfection from other people who are in the same boat as you?

Some inspirers do exist and those inspirers are the people who represent the life that can be lived. In our tradition, Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda represent that, and we are all trying to imbibe that as much as possible, according to our own abilities and limitations. It is this effort that sannyasins are making. You have associated with sannyasins for only fifteen days, therefore, you cannot be a judge of them. Live in the ashram for one year and try to match them, try to match the hardships that only they undergo. You do not know what sannyasa is or what inspires a sannyasin. How can you pass a comment or judgement on that? You are only seeing an external situation, and if you are so full of wisdom, then you should not be even asking this question; rather, you should appreciate the effort that they are putting in and which they have put in over months and years to be something in life.

If you see sannyasins getting angry or frustrated, let your compassion reach out to them as they deserve it. There is no question of even comparing or judging anyone. You only have to know that we all live our own samskaras and karmas, some with a different inspiration and motivation. When people of different mentalities meet, let there be appreciation and compassion.

According to many authors all around the world, a shift in consciousness is predicted for the near future that is also associated with the year 2012 and the end of the Mayan calendar. Could you please share your insights?

I have been hearing about the end of the world since the day I was born. The world was going to end in the 1960s. A big catastrophe was going to take place and a new humanity was going to come up. Then again in the 1970s I heard that the world was going to end and I waited 365 days. I heard many prophecies in the 1980s, which included dates. The dates came and went, yet nothing happened. Until today I have never seen a prophecy come true. How can one prophesize what is in the mind of God? You can anticipate or speculate, yet human speculation and anticipation is nothing compared to the plan that God has in mind.

Destiny

There are a few times that God laughs. One time is when a doctor tells a patient, “I will save you.” Another is when a priest tells a parishioner, “I will save you. I will save your soul,” and the third time is when people say, “I know what is in God’s mind.” These are the times when God really has a good laugh. 2012 is another year when God is going to have a good laugh. Everyone is preparing for Doomsday, and God will be practising yoga nidra. Everybody will be praying for salvation and after completing his yoga nidra God will get up and say, “Look, you are all saved.” There is nothing to worry about, and if something is going to happen, then you definitely cannot stop it.

The following is a true story. When I was living in California I had a student. He came to me one day and said, "Swamiji, everyone is predicting a big earthquake and that California is going to go down, so I am shifting with my family to Montana, a place where no earthquake has taken place before." I said, "Are you sure? I am still in California. Will I be in danger?" He said, "I don't know about you, but I know that I will be in danger," and he left California and went to live in Montana. Three months after he shifted to Montana there was an earthquake and he died in that earthquake. If something is destined to happen, then there is nothing that you can do to avoid it. Maybe the ink ran out before the Mayans could continue with their calendar, then you can still look forward to a bright future for humanity. I believe that the ink finished, not that the world will end; and when I look at my hand I see I still have many more years to live, so I cannot believe that I am going to die in 2012.

Evolution of consciousness

As far as a shift of human consciousness is concerned, a shift is always taking place. People only look at the social shift, yet beyond society there are many other levels and areas where consciousness and the powers of consciousness play an important role. On a cold winter day, if you light a fire in the middle of the room and you open the main door of the house, the heat will radiate out. Anybody who is passing through the front of your house will get this blast of heat through the open door. A fire burning in one house is not going to reduce the cold outside; however, if you start burning fires in every house and each house is radiating heat, then the outer cold will gradually become less. Consciousness has to be seen in the same manner.

There are two movements, one towards material existence and the other towards spiritual awareness; and the destiny of humanity is to cultivate spiritual awareness. When and how it happens, that is another matter; yet if you see the trend of social evolution in the world, right from the time of stone-age

existence to this modern existence, you will discover that over a period of time people have become more aware spiritually. In every decade, as people have matured at the mental, emotional and conscious levels, there has been further growth and development of human spirituality, which brings change into the life of the individual, the family, society and nation.

With all the strife, suffering and pain around the world today, there is also a counter-drive to acquire peace and stability. In this manner, there will always be a balance between the bad and the good, the negative and the positive. The positive can only be appreciated when the negative is strong. If the negative is not strong, then the positive is not even noticed. Therefore, to make people entrenched and grounded in the positive, there has to be a confrontation with the negative. This confrontation of the negative will go to its maximum potential, and we are seeing the emergence of that trend globally, now, across all nations.

By 2012 maybe things will come to a point where everyone will be insecure and not at peace, either with themselves or with other people; and then the drive to discover peace and security will emerge, which will indicate a shift in human consciousness. However, it is going to happen naturally and smoothly. You will not find an overnight wonder, where you wake up in the morning and all the problems are gone. No. It will not be like that. Dates are there only to make us aware that anything can happen in life and one should not take life for granted. If you are thinking beyond 2012, know that such dates only serve as an indication to realize the fleeting nature of existence and to make us aware that we can strive to do something better and more constructive to bring joy and peace to everyone.

Swamiji, could you please explain how to maintain the guru-disciple relationship when we leave here and how we can have our questions answered from such a distance?

The answer was given by Sri Swamiji during the Sat Chandi Mahayajna. He said that everyone needs a guru in life, and

that guru fulfils a definite role. That role is inspiration. Guru is not a consultant, that you come to the guru with your family problems, marital problems, financial problems, social problems, no. Guru serves as an inspiration. Guru serves as a mirror for recognizing one's own strengths and qualities; it is this connection with the guru that has to be maintained.

Our grandfather, Swami Sivananda, met his guru, was initiated by his guru and was imparted teaching by his guru in ten minutes only. After ten minutes of actual encounter with his guru he never saw him again; however the faith, conviction and direction given to him by his guru was so strong and powerful that it made Swami Sivananda into Swami Sivananda, the personality whom we respect today and whose teachings we try to follow in our life. How did he maintain his connection? How did his guru answer the questions? How did his guru sort out all his problems? The guru was not present. It was Swami Sivananda's faith that maintained the connection with his guru.

The same principle applies to Swami Satyananda. He left his guru's ashram after living there for twelve years and never went back to see him. Yet today he says, "I am in touch with my guru and I receive instructions and guidance from him." How did Swami Sivananda answer the questions of Swami Satyananda? Or when did Swami Sivananda intervene in Swami Satyananda's life to smooth the passage? Never. It was the conviction and faith of being a disciple that made Swami Satyananda what he is today.

This connection is something spontaneous, natural and simple. You do not have to think constantly about the guru and your connection with the guru, you only have to realize the presence of the guru in your life. Once you know the presence of guru in your life, guru is alive within you. It is something that you have to experience on your own steam. Whatever is said will make no difference to anyone as you have not gone through that experience or come to that understanding. However, once the link is there, it is there for all times to come and then you cannot ignore the presence of

guru in your mind, just as you cannot ignore the presence of your new boyfriend or girlfriend. No matter where you are, at work or at home, the image and memory of that friend is always there in front of you, and you are never satisfied until you meet with that friend. In the same manner, the memory of guru is there at all times; and as the yearning to make a connection deepens, the heart opens up more and more, and then the phone is picked up and both of you can talk.

When feeling love and devotion during bhakti yoga, must that emotion be directed toward a deity or individual, or can it be just a love and adoration for all of creation or one's life? Is the important feeling the strong energy of selfless love? Can it be love for our own soul or the higher self?

To begin with, love is not bhakti. Love is only one ingredient of bhakti. *Shraddha* or faith is another ingredient of bhakti and *vishwas*, belief, is another ingredient of bhakti. There are many different ingredients. Bhakti needs an object for the feelings and emotions to be actualized. Just as you need a ladder to go up on the roof, in the same manner you need to have an object for bhakti. By connecting with that object you can give your bhakti a direction to grow in. Therefore, in the Indian tradition bhakti begins with idol worship, and this is one tradition that Indians have not changed over centuries.

Learning about God

India was invaded many times by Christians and Muslims and we lived under their rule for many hundreds of years. When Islam came they destroyed the temples. When Christianity came they destroyed temples. They created their own mosques and churches as they were fighting against the polytheism of God. However, the Indians said, "No. It may be wrong for you culturally and religiously, but it is right for us and you cannot impose your method of worship on us. We have always believed that to experience divinity, to fix the mind on a quality of divinity, you need to give it a form." If you say that God is only unmanifest then you are limiting the

omnipresence of God. God is not only unlimited, it is also limited. God is not only formless, it also has a form. If you say God is formless you are limiting God to the formless state and therefore God cannot be omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. God is formless and in form, God is invisible and visible, God is something that can be felt and touched with the senses and something that can be experienced through the spirit.

This was the idea of bhakti that Indians maintained. Just as you need to learn your A-B-C-D – ‘a’ for apple, ‘b’ for book, ‘c’ for cat and ‘d’ for dog – and go through that basic education in order to excel in life; in the same manner, to connect with that transcendental force one has to connect with the manifest forms of that divine force. Only when you connect with the manifest forms of the divine force will you realize the transcendental existence of that power. Moses saw God in the burning bush, and received the Ten Commandments. It was because he was able to see that he realized the manifest nature and the existence of divinity. Prior to that he was questioning, “Is there a God in heaven?”

The manifest form is the form that connects the individual mind with the transcendental quality. As you cultivate your individual mind to absorb that transcendental, transformative quality, then gradually you lose the need to identify with an object and you begin to identify with the qualities of the divine: omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence.

—18 December 2008

What is the awakening of kundalini shakti like? What are the stages one has to pass through in order to allow the awakening? Once you said that there were six koshas, not five, could you explain that?

First I will tell you something totally different, as these last few days many thoughts have been coming to my mind on

what more can be done for the children and how to give them yogic samskaras.

In the year 2000 there was a major earthquake in the western part of India. After the earthquake, when the entire district was flattened to the ground, Sri Swamiji told me to go there and to see what could be done through Sivananda Math to help the people there. When I went, there were many agencies that were looking after this welfare and that welfare, this rehabilitation and that rehabilitation; however, one section was ignored and that section was the orphaned children. Nobody was willing to take them as they were an additional burden after this massive tragedy that changed many lives. It was during that visit that we decided to have a children's ashram dedicated to the memory of Swami Sivananda, and we catered for about 250 to 300 children. There were children who came to the orphanage at the age of seven, eight, nine and ten, and today, eight years later, they are thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, and undergoing studies and living in an ashram environment. Some of the boys from Bhuj were recently here.

The past president of India, Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, was a fond well-wisher of Swami Sivananda. At a time when he had felt defeated in life, Swami Sivananda had come and given some instructions. After taking up the presidency of this country, Dr Abdul Kalam came to Ganga Darshan to express his gratitude and devotion to Swami Sivananda for having guided him. When these children of the orphanage met the President during one of his visits to the earthquake devastated state, he told them, "Listen, you are living in the ashram of a person whom I met for only ten minutes and that meeting changed the entire course of my life. So imagine what your future and destiny can be if you imbibe and emulate the teachings that have inspired me until today." The president recognized that the children living in the ashram had a different mind-set, a different outlook on life and on how to deal with situations.

Children's yoga fellowship

When Dr Abdul Kalam came to Munger he also met the children of the Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, the children's yoga fellowship, who number about 9,000 in Munger town. Unfortunately, we do not have the space or time to provide them with yogic and ashram education; however, they come and spend their time here in groups, especially during the weekends and holidays. The Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal started in 1995 with five children who wanted to go to a yoga competition, yet whose parents were poor and could not afford the train fare. They came totally dejected, but I told them, "It doesn't matter. Five of you can establish an organization which will become the hallmark of yoga education to children," and these children started the Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal. From 1995 to 2000 basic training in yoga was given to over 89,000 children in Munger and around Munger district. Even today, regular classes are conducted in practically all the schools of Munger by the Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal children. During vacations they conduct yoga classes on the terraces of their homes and teach yoga to their family members and friends. For one month this is a special project, and if you ever do an aerial survey of Munger in a helicopter, you will find small groups of people being taught yoga by children on rooftops.

These children also conducted a research on themselves using five practices of yoga: three asanas and two pranayamas. To see the effect of these five practices they measured five parameters of the personality and observed the effects of the yoga practices over a period of three months. Proper data was collected and proper results and findings were put forward. I had the opportunity to present them at the UNESCO in Paris. The results were so impressive that after the presentation, yoga was made a subject in UNESCO schools in seventeen countries of Europe. The children did research on memory, concentration, creativity, discipline and awareness, using all the latest psychological questionnaires and applying them to themselves.

In our district today, there is a group of about 89,000 children who are regular practitioners of yoga and yoga teachers. Training is given to them in six-year capsules. When they join, for the first two years they are yoga demonstrators. Over the next two years they become yoga instructors, and in the following two years they become yoga teachers, yoga propagators. It is a six-year training program so that they achieve excellence in the yogic subjects, and are exposed to a range of experiences at the ashram. Once a year in June, during their summer holidays, they conduct a camp to which yoga practitioner children come from all over the city and district. It is a five-day gathering of six or seven thousand children where they conduct their own routine and classes, and we are invited to be witness to their training and teaching.

Yogic samskaras for children

This group of children in Munger are city or town children. The children in Rikhia are tribal children who are fortunate to have the continuous direction, guidance and blessings of Sri Swamiji. From absolutely no existence, they have come to a point in life where they have the ability to stand on their own two feet with dignity and with pride. In this way, a lot of work is happening with children in India – in Munger, Rikhia and in other parts – with the understanding that if there is to be a change in the human mind and consciousness, the seeds of change have to be planted at the right time so that they can become the *samskaras*, the building blocks of nature, character, mentality, and attitude – the archetypes of the human personality.

Constructing these samskaras in grown-ups is not possible. Grown-ups are fixed in their ideas, attachments, expectations, needs, desires, ambitions and lifestyle. Many other things come into play and block learning. People block themselves and don't want to learn something different, something new. The drive and the motivation to explore and to discover dies the moment you feel that you have become

something in life, after you attain your degree or status in your profession, family or society. With this conditioned nature people try different spiritual practices, however, they only dip their toes in the water and say, “The water is too cold,” or “The water is too hot,” and when they go in knee-deep they say, “I will get sucked in. This is not the right thing for me!” Therefore, despite the interest to explore and discover the inner nature, spirituality and potential, one’s conditionings inhibit and restrict the search. If the motivation is strong then there is a problem of adjustment: “How do I adjust the life which I am leading now?”

Therefore, yoga for grown-ups is only a practice for body work, mind work, to release stress, to feel high and peaceful, and to disconnect from those problem areas of life that create strife within. Beyond this grown-ups fail to transform, convert or change their pre-conditioned needs, expectations, beliefs, ideas and systems. With children, however, a balanced and positive transformation takes place in their lives, and they practise yoga in a natural, simple and spontaneous way without thinking. The practices seem to work deeper in the natures, bodies and minds of children.

Kundalini in children

If kundalini can be awakened through yoga, it will happen first with children and not grown-ups. Grown-ups cannot awaken their kundalini as straightforwardly as that. As a rule, grown-ups cannot awaken their chakras. Some people do, not everyone is incapable; however, the majority are not able to awaken the chakras or kundalini as the foundation is not there. In the absence of a foundation for that awakening, any experience of awakening will not be an enlightening one; it will just be an experience. Sometimes you may feel currents flowing through your body. Sometimes you may feel the activation of pranas in your body; sometimes you may discover that you have the ability to heal through the hands or by thinking about somebody. You may discover that you have the ability to grasp something intuitively, to

understand something and act accordingly. However, beyond such side benefits of the partial awakening of kundalini and the chakras, illumination will not come to grown-ups. They are too caught in their own samskaras and karmas, ambitions and needs, conditioning, desires and expectations.

Enlightenment will begin with children as they have no blocks and no conditioning. Kundalini will be awakened in children first, if you can expose them in the right manner to the systems and disciplines of yoga. It is not your generation that needs to be enlightened, rather you need to ensure that the future generation is enlightened so that eventually peace and happiness can prevail on this planet. By enlightening yourself you are not going to bring peace and happiness to the planet, you will only bring happiness to yourself. On the other hand, by making children the recipient of the creative potentials that God has given, you can ensure a better society in the future.

I have come across many children who in the natural course of yoga practice have come to a point where their chakras have been awakened. However, they are not obsessed about it; they do not even know that they are awakened. Nevertheless, when you see and analyze their nature, their character, their creativity, energy, clarity, confidence, grace, dignity and pride, you will discover that they have more shakti than all of us put together. Therefore, if we want to have an enlightened society, we need to provide our children with opportunities to grow – and yoga has provided the window of opportunity until now. Maybe other windows will open up in the future; however, at present, the window of opportunity is through yoga.

One day it might be those children who will go to the moon and establish an ashram there. Right now there are too few flights, too few connections and it is too expensive. Nevertheless, the Bihar School of Yoga is the owner of two acres of property in the ‘Sea of Serenity’ on the moon and there is lot of scope for yoga and the management of the effects of zero gravity. The training of yoga that has been

given so far to astronauts has proved that they can better manage their heart, respiration and oxygen consumption with minimum inhalation and exhalation, and also combat the ill effects of zero gravity. The first Indian astronaut, Rakesh Sharma, conducted experiments with yoga, and the Indian Space Research Organization has established a yoga-training centre for future astronauts. Even at NASA, yoga training is being given to the astronauts. Gradually in the course of time as more research is done, yoga will become a useful tool to deal with inter-stellar stress. Therefore, to have a base on the moon is not a bad idea at all – maybe after a few lifetimes.

Pranic awakening

Kundalini does not awaken first. Firstly, there is the awakening of the pranas and prana vayus. That is the first stage. It can happen all of a sudden and it can happen with preparation. If it happens all of a sudden, it was genetic, destined – you have come to a point in your spiritual evolution where that awakening can happen naturally and spontaneously. Alternatively, one can awaken the pranas through sadhana. Awakening of prana is the first step into the psychic dimension of yoga.

When the pranas awaken the physical sensation is that of heat, hyperactivity, dynamism. Different pranas, like prana, apana, samana, when activated, will give a different effect, will create a different condition. For example, there is a problem called walker's syndrome where at night you just want to get up and start walking, the legs are itching to walk. This is very much a pranic activation. Similarly, if there is an imbalance in prana or an overactivity of prana you will feel the effect in the lungs and heart. If there is hypoactivity of apana you will feel it in the corresponding body organs, such as the stomach, intestines, gallbladder, kidneys or liver. Therefore, with the awakening of each prana the fusion of prana shakti into the physical organs will alter the function and the performance of the physical

organs, and correspondingly a change will be felt in the cerebral and mental activity. When the pranas are awakened and are affecting the mind, you will find your thoughts quickly jumping from one thing to the other. Thoughts will be running like a horse on a merry-go-round that will not stop. Therefore, these different awakenings have to be compensated for with the practices of pratyahara and dharana. Firstly, you awaken prana with something and then you regulate it with something else.

Chakra awakening

After the awakening of pranas, the chakras will begin to awaken. That will be the second stage. As the chakras awaken you will confront altered states of consciousness: a state of depression that will be there for some time until you are able to come out of it; a state of anxiety, until you are able to come out of it; a state of compassion will last for some time until you again become normal. One doctor, Lee Sennela, wrote a book on kundalini – *Kundalini Transcendence or Psychosis?* He found that the kundalini practitioners used to go through many different experiences over a period of time. In one week, they could be seven different people, not as in the case of a split personality but living an altered state of consciousness. To handle the mind at that time it is necessary to have a competent master, a guru. In the absence of a competent master it is quite possible to end up in a mental asylum, as the perception of reality becomes different.

The perception of reality becomes different in any altered state of consciousness. When you are sleeping at night and you dream that somebody is chasing you with a knife, the dream is so real that you begin to sweat and you begin to run and you begin to feel fear. Only when you wake up do you realize that it was a nightmare, and you are relieved. While you are in that state it is as real as being awake, and therefore even in dreams we experience an altered state of consciousness. Imagine then, with the chakras awakening –

mooladhara awakening, swadhisthana awakening, manipura awakening, anahata awakening – all the tamasic, rajasic and sattwic qualities of each chakra have to be confronted. Therefore, guidance from guru is needed to maintain balance and to maintain your connection with the sattwic force of the chakra, the sattwic state of consciousness. It is with chakra awakening that many new areas of the brain and mind open up and other types of creativity manifest.

Overcoming siddhis

Many years ago, in 1982, I was living in the States, and Christmas time was the dulllest period at the ashram. I used to get in my car, pack the camping gear, drive to a campground in the mountains, camp there for a week and practise higher sadhanas. Once on such an outing, as I was practising at night, I heard some loud music. It was so loud that I came out of the tent to see whether some other campers had come and were playing their TV or radio. It was dark, pitch black, and there was nobody around that I could see, yet the music was extremely loud, like a loudspeaker. I got in the car, turned on the headlights and drove around the whole camp. There was nobody around, yet the music was intense. I went to find the office manager, however, it was the middle of night and the office was closed. After about one hour of searching I still couldn't find anybody and so I went back to my tent. I sat down and said to myself, 'If the music is not outside, it is inside.' With that thought, I went into meditation and turned the volume down. I was able to do that.

For many years after that I had an ability that I had to forcibly stop – I could compose any kind of music: classical western, classical Indian, kirtan, bhajan, pop songs or rock. You would only have to hum a tune and I would be able to play it. I was surprised. From where did this ability come? Even today it surprises me; however, after so many years today I understand what happened in 1982. It was an awakening, an altered state that over time I had to learn how to handle. If I hadn't handled it, I would be in

a lunatic asylum listening to music and being injected with drugs to keep me quiet. This is an example, a real one that I have experienced and wilfully stopped. I said, “No, it is disturbing me now.” Nevertheless, that is an experience of an awakening. Like this, many other experiences have proved that there has to be some intervention after an awakening has taken place, whether that intervention to stop or regulate the awakening is initiated by you or guru. In the same manner, if you read the books on kundalini by Gopi Krishna, he mentions that with the awakening of chakras different abilities manifested in his life – arts, music, science, literature, poetry, things he was never exposed to before but which came naturally. Therefore, this awakening of the dormant brain centres or mind centres is the awakening of the chakras.

Kundalini awakening

The third awakening is that of kundalini. Kundalini is the transmutation of the gross energies into transcendental energies. Kundalini is not a serpent; it is the total sum of manifest energy that is experienced in the body in the form of a current, like the slithering movement of a snake. *Kundalini shakti* is the primal energy at rest after having gone through the entire process of creation from transcendental to gross matter; and it is the reconversion of the gross matter into transcendental energy that is indicated by the ascent of kundalini. When kundalini ascends to mooladhara, the energy contained in gross matter, earth, is converted to its pure form. When kundalini ascends to swadhisthana, the water element is converted to its pure essence; then manipura, the fire element; followed by anahata, the air element. There is a complete change and transformation of the elements, and one becomes the master of the elements. In English such a person is called the weatherman. You become the weatherman. You control the elements; you control the gross nature and the subtle nature of the elements. Kundalini in sahasrara represents the ultimate awakening, the final flowering of the human effort to experience the divine.

Patalas, chakras and lokas

The path of kundalini is an endless path. From the point of view presented in tantric literature there are twenty-one states of consciousness that kundalini has to pass through. These states are grouped in sevens. The first seven dormant, instinctive, primitive animal tendencies and vrittis are called *patalas*. Then at the human level, the seven dimensions of existence and experience are called chakras, and beyond the human level, at the transcendental level are the seven lokas. The sahasrara of an animal is the mooladhara of a human being, and the sahasrara of the human being is the mooladhara of a divine being. Your sahasrara is the mooladhara of the God-nature, and your mooladhara is the sahasrara of the animal nature inside you.

These are the twenty-one altered states of consciousness, from an instinctive, primitive and raw state to a most refined, pure, harmonious and clear state of consciousness. Kundalini ascends through all of these. You may think that your journey and effort finishes in sahasrara, but no. The human nature is transcended in sahasrara and then there is a progression and development of the divine nature beyond sahasrara. The last dimension of consciousness is *satya loka*, the dimension of truth. Satya loka is the divine sahasrara, and there the whole individuality is renounced and one becomes one with that eternal principle of truth. These are the stages that one goes through with the awakening of kundalini.

Six koshas

Along with this another thing happens. A merger of bodies takes place. This body contains five different bodies, which are known as the *pancha kosha*, and these koshas represent the possibility or the potential that is inherent in life, that is inherent in existence, to achieve the highest. The yogis, the yogic literature and the interpreters of yoga have looked at the name pancha kosha, five sheaths, yet they have not looked at the other sentence that states ‘in this body’. They say that the koshas are five; however, if you include the latter

half of the sentence, ‘in this body’, then the koshas become six – the body being separate.

Most say the five koshas are annamaya kosha, pranamaya kosha, manomaya kosha, vijnanamaya kosha and anandamaya kosha. This includes *annamaya kosha*, the physical body, the body of matter, as one of the five. However, the sentence says, ‘five koshas in this body’. Where is the sixth one? It is the *atmamaya kosha* in which the awareness of spirit pervades all the time. Therefore, in annamaya kosha there are five bodies, which are pranamaya kosha, manomaya kosha, vijnanamaya kosha, anandamaya kosha and atmamaya kosha.

At present these different levels of experience within us are not fused together. The pranas support the senses, the senses support the mind, the extrovert mind supports the impressions of consciousness. The most recent impressions of consciousness create *samskaras* or impressions that either inspire and elate us or move us away from our journey. With the awakening of kundalini, these koshas become one. Right now they are not united; however, when they become one, what you feel is your atma experienced in the physical body, the annamaya, and what you wish in manomaya is actualized in the world around you – you become the luminary, the enlightened being with the fusion of the pancha koshas in the body of matter.

How can one know his or her achievable spiritual aim in life?

You have to discover your own achievable spiritual aim in life. I had read many definitions yet nothing attracted me so I started to think what could be my achievable aim in life, and I came upon a single word: excellence. If I apply this word ‘excellence’ to things that I do in life then there is always striving for perfection and improvement; that is my choice and my goal. Whether I improve my spirituality, my social skills, communication skills or administrative skills, the idea of excellence will touch each and every aspect of my life.

Excel in meditation also, why not? Excel in love, compassion, and wisdom also, why not? Excel as a sannyasin and as a yoga teacher, why not? Excel as a yoga teacher, sannyasin and as an individual also, why not? That is the aim that I have given myself. It is copyrighted. You choose one for yourself. Royalties? Yes, if you want to give me royalties you can, we will draw up a contract!

In the books it says that yoga practices are fruitless without guidance from a guru. Is that true? What if one doesn't get any guidance? Would it be of benefit to just practise from books?

Books can only guide you to a point, not beyond. You cannot even complete basic education with just a book; you need the help of your teachers and parents. Somebody has to be there to tell you what two plus two equals. Although the answer is written there, two plus two can be four, and two plus two can be twenty-two. Now who will correct you? You need human intervention. Even if you are learning how to write 'A', 'B' and 'C' by following the script written in a notebook, you can write them ten times each yet somebody has to come and say, "Look, the line is going in the wrong direction. It has to be straight." The most basic kindergarten and primary education cannot be completed with only a book, and people want to perfect yoga with a book? No. Books are there after you have learned, to keep reminding you of the process; however, the learning has to be done with a teacher, and if you learn well, you do not need a book.

—19 December 2009

When you are feeling distressed and full of confusion people say to follow your heart, but what do you do when your heart feels most of the pain?

How do you differentiate between the mind function and the heart function? Different desires, thoughts and behaviours are expressions of the mind. In the same

manner, emotion, feeling and intuiting are behaviours of the heart. The seat of all the non-intellectual perceptions and experiences is the heart.

In the vedic tradition two ideas have been given. One idea is for non-believers: that one's own spirit resides in the heart. Another idea is for the believers: that God resides in the heart in the form of inner luminosity. Now these two ideas are really one and the same; it is only a play of words. The human spirit, *atma*, resides in the heart and *paramatma*, the supreme spirit or God, resides in the heart. The point here is that the perception, the understanding of the heart is not the intellectual understanding or perception of the mind. Knowledge or understanding gained through the heart will be intuitive.

Take an example. You are in strife with somebody who is two feet bigger and broader than you. You are angry, furious. The emotion of anger is welling up inside of you, however, despite such strong emotions, there will be another part of yourself that will say, "Hey, he is bigger than me," and you will think twice before trying to fight. You are seeing a response to the emotion of anger by a little voice; intuitive knowing of the outcome, and following that is following the heart, not following the emotion.

Analysis and logic sometimes cloud the perceptions, and sometimes intuition saves you from different situations. Just as there is an aggressive emotional energy, there is also a passive receptive energy. Faculties such as intuition manifest when the passive energy is predominant and the aggressive emotional energies are calmed down. First, be aware and make the attempt to perfect this understanding and differentiation. Gradually make the attempt to identify the wave of emotion that stirs up inside, as beyond that there is a tiny voice telling you what is right and what is wrong.

Sometimes with a relative or friend we have the urge to give them advice on something related to their lifestyle, education of their children, and so on. At the same time,

we do not want to hurt their feelings. Most of the time, there is a negative reaction if we do this. Should we be concerned just with our own action or should we try to tell them? What is the best way to tell?

From a common sense point of view, rather than a spiritual or yogic point of view, it seems that people put on the label 'Know All' and start giving advice to other people on how they should live their life. If we begin to give advice on how to live life, then we also should be able to receive the fall out of such advice. You are talking of relatives and friends, and you are talking of the need to advise. You have forgotten a crucial ingredient in the whole thing. Where is the application of your wisdom that tells you this is the time to advise and this is not the time to advise? If you have wisdom, you do not have to ask this question; and if you do not have wisdom, giving you the answer to this question will not help you in any way as you still will not know when to interfere and when not to interfere. Therefore, the safest way is to stay away.

Do you believe in soul mates?

The concept of soul mates is a Western concept. There is no reference to it in the Eastern traditions, ancient or modern. Eastern traditions have a different understanding of the soul and the behaviour of the soul; they do not view the soul as one multiplying itself into many. This reference came only once in our literature and scriptures. When creation took place from nothing, at that time it is said that God was alone. He looked all around, and the desire came, 'Let me multiply, for my own sake, for my own pleasure', and God multiplied. However, this multiplicity of God is not in relation to one soul being many; rather it is the potential of that divine nature manifesting in all other creative forms. The essence of water can be perceived when you look at the ocean and when you look at a single drop of water. For whatever reason separation took place, the essence is still full in all the separate forms. This is the only reference in the vedic literature.

The idea of why there are so many people in the world and from where the souls are coming, are not relevant in the Eastern mystical traditions. Why do you have more rain one year and another year not a single drop of rain? Everything is dependent on permutations and combinations of events and cycles which are natural, astronomical, divine and human all put together. In the same manner, birth and death depend on different combinations and permutations of the divine elements with natural elements, with human elements and with astronomical elements.

In the recorded history of the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana* and other epics, moments in time have been described when events have taken place during different conjunctions of planets and stars. These activities have repeated themselves over a period of thousands of years, at a specific moment, including an outburst of population when certain constellations are in the sky for one or two hundred years. At that time there is overpopulation. When that conjunction ends there is a decline in population. It is similar to the environment. It rains when it becomes the right time to rain and then after the rain again the sky is clear. All this information is there, however, nobody has actually deciphered it. Due to such experiences the Eastern traditions have never believed in one soul dividing and still remaining connected with itself in other forms; each soul comes with its own karma, samskara, basic character and destiny.

This drive for a soul mate is generally only seen in young girls. Beyond forty nobody talks of a soul mate. Before the age of forty, when the hormones are at their peak, when the body is flushing and the emotions are splashing, at that time one is searching for a soul mate. After forty the hormones slow down, the fire and heat in the body and emotions calm down, and then one tries to find a stable mate, not a soul mate. This idea of a soul mate is so strange. Throughout life people are trying to find somebody who can match their mind and expectation, and they take one, they leave that one, they take another one, and so on. People do not even

find somebody compatible with their mind, nature, character and personality. Then, how should they realize that this is the true mate for life?

If it is true that one finds a soul mate, it is not an instant recognition; rather, it is a recollection at the time of death that this person has played an important role in one's life and one remains appreciative of that person and grateful. At that time, one does not even remember parents, brothers and sisters, one remembers that person who has contributed to making one as one is today. That person is the real soul mate who has helped one evolve, but this realization comes only at the time of death or after seventy, when one feels isolated from the world. Families have lived together, thinking that they are the two who make it happen for each other, find themselves living a less than happy and contented life. Then another soul mate enters their life and they say, "Oh well." These are 'need mates'. People who have lived together for so many years, with the thought that their partner is the only one in their life, suddenly turn against each other, bickering and hating each other, not wanting anything to do with each other. These are not isolated incidences; there are many such incidents.

Most people have not even found their mind mate; in fact they are only looking for a need mate, a person who can fulfil their needs, whether these are physical, sensorial, sensual, social, intellectual or emotional. A 'soul mate' is only a label that is given to the need mate of the time. A soul mate is simply an idea when we need support and comfort in life.

If you know how to live your life properly and support and encourage everyone then everyone is a soul mate. That is the philosophy that Sri Swamiji has stated. He says, my neighbourhood is my family, the entire world is my family. It isn't just my group of four who live with me who are my family. What do you see in the other members of the family? You see yourself. You do not communicate, associate or connect with those in whom you do not see yourself. The

next door neighbour may be a pious person yet there is no contact, there is no communication, there is no awareness of that good person, my next door neighbour.

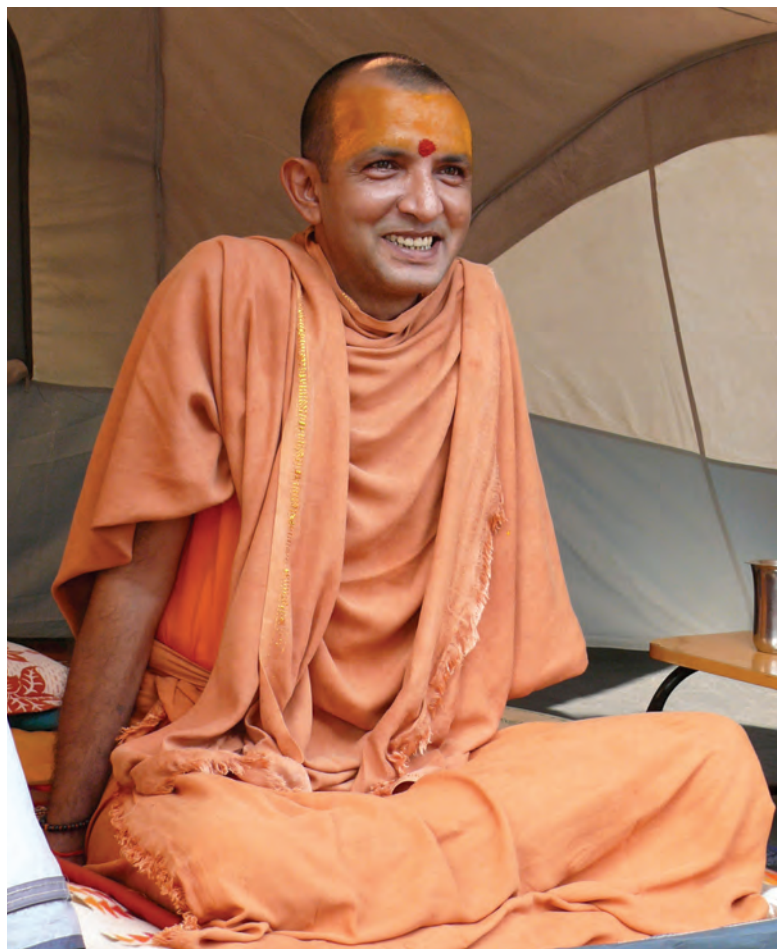
You live isolated lives in the West. To bring some spark into these isolated lives such concepts do come up every decade or so to overcome the depression of living an emotionally unsupported, intellectually unsupported, and socially unsupported life – in what you call the nuclear family. Developing the understanding that ‘I can see myself in everyone’ is the cultivation of *atmabhava*. By cultivating *atmabhava* you appreciate and realize that the essence in each one of us is the same. Whether you are contained in the ocean, in a bottle or a cup; whether you are salty or sweet, hot or cold, the essence of water is there in each one. It is that essence that is appreciated and that recognition of the essence that gives you fulfilment and knowledge and can quench the thirst. When you see H_2O in a small cup you know it is H_2O . When you see H_2O in the ocean you know it is H_2O . When you see a raindrop fall you know it is H_2O . Even a drop can fulfil and quench the thirst as long as the essence is there. When you are aware of the same essence in every individual then correct action will also follow.

First, try to find a stable mate in life. Do not worry about a soul mate or mind mate. Instead find somebody who is stable in life to support you and encourage you. Find someone who will be with you even in the most difficult and trying times, not only to share moments of happiness and pleasure. Actually, there is a statement that relationships, friendship, scriptures, and God are good to test out at the time of trials. They all have to be tested. Even the relationship between husband and wife has to be tested from time to time to ensure that it is stable. Friendship has to be tested to know that it can stand any trial and tribulation. Wisdom, knowledge and interpretation of scriptures have to be tested to see that they fulfil the present need. Our conviction and faith in God must also be tested to know that it is unshakeable and firm. This is the

statement from the Vedas: test everything. Not just once, continue testing all your life.

This understanding comes at the last moment of your life. Then you know that you were helped and who your soul supporters were, and at that time there is an appreciation of their role in your life. That is the only time you realize who are the people who make a difference in your life.

—20 December 2008



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Swami Niranjanananda was born in Rajnandgaon (Chhattisgarh) in 1960. Guided from birth by his guru, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, he came to live at the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger at the age of four where he received training in yogic and spiritual sciences through yoga nidra. In 1971 he was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa, and for twelve years he lived overseas, acquiring an understanding of different cultures and helping further his guru's mission to spread yoga 'from door to door and shore to shore'.



He returned to India in 1983 to guide the activities of Bihar School of Yoga, Sivananda Math and Yoga Research Foundation at Ganga Darshan. In 1990 he was initiated as a paramahansa sannyasin and in 1993 anointed spiritual preceptor in succession to Swami Satyananda Saraswati. He established Bihar Yoga Bharati, the first university of yoga, in 1994, Yoga Publications Trust in 2000, and a children's yoga movement, Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, in 1995. He travelled extensively to guide seekers around the world until 2009, when he received the command to commence a new phase of sannyasa life.

In 2010, he established Sannyasa Peeth, to enable seekers to experience the spiritual and cultural traditions of India in their essence. The year marked his entry into a phase of higher sadhana and tirtha yatra.

In 2013, he conducted the World Yoga Convention in Munger to celebrate the golden jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga, and launched a new era of yogic renaissance. In 2013 he also commenced the arduous panchagni sadhana. In 2014, he embarked on a Bharat Yatra, an all-India tour, transmitting the gift of yoga to all. Since then, Swami Niranjan has been working to develop the next stage of yogic training and teaching, and has initiated several programs to help people deepen their experience of yoga and imbibe the traditional wisdom. Simultaneously, he has revived various ancient knowledge systems and practices of India.

In 2017, he received the Padma Bhushan, the third highest civilian award given by the Government of India, for the outstanding work in the field of yoga.

Author of many classic books on yoga and other spiritual streams, Swami Niranjan is a magnetic source of wisdom on all aspects of yogic philosophy, practice and lifestyle. He ably combines tradition with modernity as he continues to work for his guru's mission.



On the Wings of the Swan series consists of discourses and satsangs given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati at Ganga Darshan Vishwa Yogapeeth, Munger.

These teachings, presented in their original question and answer format, contain a wealth of wisdom applicable to all yogic aspirants seeking guidance and inspiration for living a harmonious life. A yogi from birth, Swami Niranjan's approach combines practicality, empathy, compassion, warmth, humour and penetrating insight. No matter what the question, Swami Niranjan lends it an ease unique to him, bringing together an ancient spiritual tradition and an understanding of the current way of life. With each answer, he takes us right into the heart of the matter and provides a fresh perspective on it.

This volume covers lectures given in 2008 at Ganga Darshan. The topics covered are extensive and varied, addressing countless aspects of yoga, yogic lifestyle and spiritual life.



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